ACTING *Natural*

Monologs, Dialogs and Playlets For Teens

BY PEG KEHRET

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by
PEG
KEHRET

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For Chelsea Elizabeth
November 24, 1990

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

I have assigned names and genders to most of the roles in this book. However, many parts can be played by either a female or a male, and names can be changed, as desired.

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PREFACE

It is rare for dramatic material to portray teens with respect, to address the issues they are interested in, and to stimulate their thinking in new directions. In *Acting Natural*, I attempt to do all of this and more.

Young people today are faced with the enormous challenge of forming their opinions on a wide variety of topics. Often they need help in seeing all sides of complex issues. I expect this book to stimulate thinking and provoke discussion. It is not enough to entertain; my purpose here is also to stretch minds and hearts by introducing fresh ideas and exploring various points of view, in language that young actors find comfortable and natural. I want to help them remove the blinders of unawareness, apathy and self-absorption.

I also hope to free the young actors who read these lines from any reluctance to voice their opinions and feelings. Teens are often reticent to state their views, fearing that others will disagree. Because it is easier to speak as a character, rather than as oneself, drama is a tool which encourages communication. The monologs, dialogs and playlets in *Acting Natural* allow teens to express their feelings through a character, enabling actors and audience to confidently assess ideas, to discuss all sides of controversial topics, and to share their conclusions.

These 60 pieces discuss teen pregnancy, family relationships, preoccupation with weight, ecology, exclusive dating, animal rights, materialism, outgrowing a friendship, and dozens of other subjects of high interest to teens. I have tried to approach each topic with grace, humor, and an open mind, using realistic situations and authentic dialogue.

It is my hope that those who use this book will laugh and think, and encourage each other to respond honestly. Most of all, I hope they will find useful insights into the problems and joys of growing up.

Peg Kehret

FOREWORD

I became acquainted with Peg Kehret back in 1975. It was then that *The Spirit of Happy Hollow* (later shortened to *Spirit*) won our very first nationwide playwriting award here at Northern Michigan University. Her "thoughtful comedy" had wit, charm, poignancy and relevance—characteristics, I was soon to discover, of the playwright herself. She also surprised and thrilled me by changing the leading character's name to Clara Panowski when the play was published. Her thoughtful gesture has never been forgotten.

After devouring *Acting Natural*, I am delighted to report that those qualities that initially drew me to her work have been honed and fine tuned. Her observations of young adults and the world in which they live are as acute, as perceptive and as fresh as tomorrow's headlines.

Kehret does not shy away from such sometimes unsettling topics as teenage sex (*Prom Night Party*), unwed mothers (*A Baby of My Own*), homosexuality (*Sticks and Stones*), drinking and driving (*One Every Twenty-Two Minutes* and *Only A Few Beers*) and divorce (*Happy Endings*). She confronts these very real teen problems with insight, good taste and compassion.

Acting Natural also zeros in upon wider issues that affect adults as well as teens. *Going for Broke* deals with the inequities of rich vs. poor; *Human Beans* reminds us that frogs are "human," too, and that we must follow through with the courage of our convictions; *Will I Kill You, If I Have To?* is a chilling look inside the minds of two young soldiers as they come to grips with the terrible realities of war and death; *Heartbeats* shows teens' efforts to save the animal and wildlife victims of an oil slick; *The Simple Life* reminds us how important the earth's resources are; *Transformation* ponders what life would be like if *we* were animals; and *Five Minutes to Change the World* offers some practical suggestions on how to do just that.

Don't be misled; Peg Kehret is a pixie at heart with a wry and wonderful sense of humor. Just take a look at *Yum, Yum, Broccoli* (shades of George Bush); *Baseball Fanatic; Sisterly Love; Letter from Camp* (shades of Allan Sherman); and *Dear Jan Slander*, a hysterical spoof of advice to the lovelorn.

I must confess that several of my favorites are those that "sneak up" on you and leave you with a smile on your face as well as a lump in your throat. Such is the case with *I'll Be There, Friends Forever, Flowers Won't Bring Billy Back* and *Red Roses for A Dead Cat.* But I suspect my real favorite is *My Head Is Full of Starshine.* This monolog may well be a mini-autobiography of Peg Kehret herself—of any writer, any real artist.

Having taught high school for a number of years, I am well aware of just how difficult it is to find quality material that speaks to young adults, is within the grasp of their developing thespian talents, and that runs the gamut of topics and genre. Such is the welcome case with this wonderful collection of monologs, dialogs and playlets.

Acting Natural can certainly be used in the speech and drama classroom, for competitions, and as discussion starters. I would also highly recommend this book for psychology and sociology classes, as well as for health and family living courses.

When all is said and done, may I suggest that you simply pick up *Acting Natural* and read it from cover to cover for pure pleasure. You'll find, as I have, that it's as good a read as any book on the best-seller list! Enjoy!

James A. Panowski, Ph.D.
Director, Forest Roberts Theatre
Northern Michigan University

Monologs

UNNECESSARY RULES
YUM, YUM, BROCCOLI
EVERYTHING BAD HAPPENS TO ME
PAINTING THE ROCK
LET'S HEAR IT FOR THE ONE-PARENT FAMILY
HAPPY ENDINGS
UNPAID BABY SITTER
TEENAGE STRESS
MY MOTHER IS SIXTEEN YEARS OLD
LETTER FROM CAMP
MY FATHER NEVER HUGGED ME
IT'S NOT MY FAULT
FIRST AND LAST BABY-SITTING JOB
REMEMBERING BOO-BOO
FREE ICE CREAM ALL SUMMER
FAMILY TALK
SLUG SLIME AND OTHER ENDEARMENTS
MY HEAD IS FULL OF STARSHINE
NINTENDO HUMILIATION
GRANDMA THINKS I'M BEAUTIFUL

1

UNNECESSARY RULES

Mrs. Morgan has a rule about not chewing gum in class. Did you ever hear anything so ridiculous? What does chewing gum have to do with learning mathematics? I can do fractions just as well with gum in my mouth as I can without it. It bugs me when people have rules for no reason.

Mrs. Morgan is big on rules. For her math class, we have to turn in our weekly homework no later than noon on Friday. Why noon? What is so sacred about twelve o'clock? I'm not Cinderella.

Once I forgot to turn in my homework during class, so I took it to her Friday afternoon, after school. Do you know what she did? She gave me an extra assignment, due on Monday morning. Talk about unfair. Why should I have to do homework on the weekend?

Supposedly, I take Mrs. Morgan's class in order to learn math, but sometimes it seems I'm learning more about how to follow unnecessary rules than I am about numbers. My mother says there are reasons for school rules. Sure there are. Personally, I think the reason is because Mrs. Morgan wants to have power over the students.

Last week, I decided to test her. I broke one of her rules on purpose, to see what would happen. We had a one-page home test, where we got to take the test home and use as much time as we wanted to answer the questions. Theoretically, everyone should get one hundred percent of the answers right on a home test, since we are allowed to use the textbooks.

I worked hard on my home test, and I was positive I got everything right. But Mrs. Morgan had another of her ridiculous rules this time. "The home test must be mounted on construction paper or cardboard." Did you ever hear of anything so dumb? Why should we have to mount our math tests on heavy paper? So I didn't. I wanted to see if I would get an A for my correct answers or if she would downgrade me because of her silly rule.

Here is what happened: I got the A. However, I had to stay after school that afternoon and scrape gum off the bottoms of the chairs. Talk about gross! Big wads of purple gum and gray gum, stuck right on the furniture. I pried them off with a paint scraper. It was disgusting.

While I was doing that, Mrs. Morgan hung all the home tests in the gymnasium, because there was an Open House for parents the next night. That is, she hung all the tests except mine. Since mine was not mounted on heavy paper, it didn't work for the display.

My parents and I went to the Open House. I waited for them to notice that my math test wasn't there with the others. I thought they would be upset and would tell Mrs. Morgan what they thought of her stupid rules. Instead, do you know what my parents said? They said Mrs. Morgan is preparing us for the real world. They said when I grow up, I will have to follow certain rules that my employer has and I might just as well learn to do it gracefully.

I said what possible difference does it make if I turn in my homework at noon on Friday or at three-thirty? So my dad asked Mrs. Morgan about that. She said she has a free period from one until two on Fridays, so she can correct the homework papers then. Otherwise, she has to take them home with her and do them on the weekend. She tries to keep weekends for her family.

Then she said something else that completely astounded me. She said she was sorry she had neglected to make her reasons clear to me. She said in the future, she would try to be sure I understood why she had certain rules. She even said it's good that I question rules and think for myself instead of blindly doing everything I'm told.

Can you believe it? Mrs. Morgan stood up for me! Maybe she isn't power hungry, after all.

YUM, YUM, BROCCOLI

I have a secret. Nobody knows it—not my parents or my brother. Not even my best friend. I've heard it isn't good to keep a secret all bottled up inside yourself. If you do, some day the bottle will explode and you'll end up with shattered nerves, so I've decided to confess my secret to you.

Here it is. I do not have a food problem. Repeat: I do *not* have any problems with food.

Shocking, isn't it? Everyone else in the universe has what's called an eating disorder. Some of my friends are bulimic. Some are allergic to wheat or milk or tomatoes. Some are anorexic. Some are picky eaters who have never tasted anything green. Some claim food addictions that produce overwhelming cravings for marshmallows or French fries or salted cashews. At noon in the school cafeteria, people play a conversational game called, "My Food Addiction Is Worse than Your Food Addiction."

When they finish with that, they talk about how dreadful the school lunches are. I never say anything. How can I? I like tuna sandwiches and macaroni casseroles and carrot sticks. I like all the food that the other kids complain about. I even like cauliflower. It's embarrassing.

Some people get up at night and sneak into the bathroom to eat chocolate bars. I could never do that. Oh, I can understand waking up and feeling hungry, although usually I roll over and go back to sleep. Once in a great while, I'm hungry enough to actually crawl out of my warm bed and put my bare feet on the icy floor and walk to the kitchen for a slice of cold pizza or some leftover apple pie. But I cannot imagine choosing to eat it in the bathroom. Why not just sit at the table? Or curl up on the sofa, wrapped snug in an afghan? Or even scurry back to bed and prop up the pillow and eat there? Somehow, the bathroom is not my idea of the proper atmosphere for eating. But judging from the number of people who tell me that they sneak treats there, someone should open a restaurant decorated with bathtubs and sinks. If they used toilets instead of chairs, they'd probably make a fortune.

At least half the kids I know are on a diet. Make that two-thirds. My friends aren't fat. They're just scared that they might get fat someday if they don't go on a diet now. They say things like, "I love chocolate shakes, but I'll just have a diet soda." That is one of the saddest sentences I've ever heard. If you really love chocolate shakes, why not have one now and then and cut back on calories somewhere else? I've decided the people who say "I love chocolate shakes, but I'll just have a diet soda" don't really want the chocolate shake. What they want is to feel noble. I'm never sure if it spoils their fun or increases it when I drink my chocolate shake in front of them.

Maybe I'd be more like everyone else if I quit eating breakfast. I like breakfast. I always have orange juice or a grapefruit. Cereal or toast. Milk. Sometimes even an egg. I do not know one other person who eats a traditional breakfast. They drink prepared diet drinks or they eat chocolate donuts, or both. Most common of all, they skip breakfast entirely.

It worries me that I'm so different. I'm always hungry at meal time, but I rarely snack in between. When I read those weight charts that magazines sometimes print, I'm exactly the perfect weight for my age and height. I like dessert, including chocolate, but I can open a package of cookies and eat only one. Clearly, there's something wrong with me.

Well, now you know my secret. I am the only person alive who does not suffer from a food addiction and who is not on a diet. No matter how hard I try to overcome it, I remain well nourished and happy. Please don't tell anyone. I don't want any pity.

3

EVERYTHING BAD HAPPENS TO ME

Everything bad happens to me. I am jinxed. There must be a witch doctor somewhere who has a voodoo doll of me for people to stick pins into. Long, sharp pins. Why else would everything go wrong in my life, when I have done absolutely nothing to deserve such rotten luck?

For example: Last week, I was lying on the floor finishing my semester workbook for biology and watching the ball game on TV when I noticed that my dog, Comet, had an odd look on his face. He looked as if he might have something in his mouth that didn't taste good. Being a person who is kind to animals, I was immediately concerned. First I said, "Drop it," several times, hoping Comet would spit out whatever it was, but he just sat there with enormous, sad eyes and his mouth shut.

Wondering if he might have a sore tooth, I tried to pry open his jaws and look. This made Comet act even more unhappy than before. He clenched his teeth tightly together and whimpered softly.

Finally I let go of his head and sat back to watch the ball game. It was third down and goal to go when Comet began to gag. Probably every dog owner recognizes the sound of a pet who is about to throw up. It creates instant panic as the owner frantically looks for a newspaper to stick in front of the dog. Pet owners know from experience that it is far easier to throw out a newspaper than it is to clean the carpet.

Unfortunately, my instinct to grab a piece of paper was faster than my reasoning ability. Comet gagged, I grabbed, and before I realized what I was doing, he had urped all over my biology workbook.

I slaved for six weeks on that workbook; there wasn't time to do it over. I had to face my biology teacher the next morning with a semester workbook that not only had big blotches on most of the pages, but also had a distinctly unappealing odor.

When I complained to my mother that everything bad happens to me, she hinted that if I had not been so engrossed in the football game I was watching, I would have noticed what I was sticking under Comet's heaving mouth.

I might have known I wouldn't get any sympathy from her. She has been telling me for years that I should not watch TV while I do my homework.

I had barely recovered from the Comet episode when the great tree-planting disaster occurred. There's a new housing development going in not far from where I live. It's sad to see the trees being cut down and the land leveled. Late one afternoon, as I watched the bulldozers finish their work, I spotted a young tree growing right in their path. The next day, I knew it would be gone.

As soon as the workers left, I got a shovel and went back to the site. I dug up the sapling, which was about three feet high, and dragged it home. I felt so good about saving the little tree's life that I decided to plant it right outside my bedroom window, where I could see it first thing every morning and last thing every night. So many bad things happen to me; this would be constant evidence of something good.

I had a hard time getting the hole big enough. For such a short tree, there were an awful lot of roots. First I dug up a round circle of grass. Then I kept going deeper. Several times, my shovel clicked on a rock and I had to wiggle the shovel back and forth to get through. I nearly had the hole deep enough when my shovel went, *clunk*. From the sound of it, this rock was huge. Wiggling the shovel didn't help. I had to push as hard as I could, standing on the shovel with both feet, before the shovel finally went deeper.

At last I got the tree in the hole, filled in the dirt, and watered it. I went inside, sweaty, dirty and pleased with myself. My father was home, and he was anything but pleased. He was on the telephone with the cable TV company, complaining because the cable went out right in the middle of his favorite program.

When he hung up, he said the company already had trucks out trying to locate and correct the problem. He grumbled that some idiot had cut the cable in half. Actually, he did not use the word *idiot*, but there are certain things my father says which I am not allowed to repeat.

I cannot repeat what he said a short time later, either, when the cable TV people knocked on our door.

That last rock I hit with my shovel was not a rock at all. It was the television cable. Our entire neighborhood was without cable for three hours, and they all knew where the problem was because the truck was parked right in front of my house.

As I said, bad things happen to me. I'm reminded of that every morning and every night, when I look out my window and see the tree, growing where Dad planted it, about six feet from the original hole.

4

PAINTING THE ROCK

There's a big rock on the edge of town. It's visible from the freeway. Every few weeks, someone paints a message on the rock—something like "Nick Loves Julie." Or a group from the senior class will paint their class year, futilely hoping it will stay there forever, instead of getting painted over by the juniors with *their* class year.

Ever since I first knew about the rock, I've had a burning ambition to paint it. I would never paint my name and then broadcast to the world my love for some girl. I don't even have a date for next Saturday's dance, much less a love relationship to announce. Besides, my parents would have a fit if they saw my name there. They would say I had defaced public property, although the rock has already been painted so many times I don't think one more coat is going to make any difference. Still, my parents would not be overjoyed if they learned I had climbed the hill beside the freeway, paint brush in hand.

That's why I decided to do it after dark. Just in case any of my parents' friends happened to be driving that section of the freeway. I wore my black jeans and a dark jacket. I wore a ski mask, too. Partly, the ski mask was so I couldn't be recognized and partly it was because the air next to the freeway smells like exhaust fumes, and I didn't want to pass out in the middle of my paint job.

Usually, painting the rock is a group effort. I intended to be the first person ever to pull off the job alone.

There would be one other big difference in my rock painting adventure. Everyone would like my message.

Often, the messages on the rock made people angry. When the seniors painted their class year on the rock, the juniors got mad. When the Republicans painted their candidate's name, the Democrats had a fit. Sometimes, even things like "Nick Loves Julie" create a ruckus, because it turns out that it wasn't Nick who painted the rock at all, but Nick's buddies, who knew

Nick couldn't stand the sight of Julie, and who did it for a practical joke. Julie wasn't too happy, either.

I elected to paint a message that would upset no one: "Smile." That's all; just one, little, happy word—smile. Simple, but perfect. I bought bright yellow paint, and laid my plans carefully. I chose the night my parents go to their weekly bridge club. I asked if I could use the other car for an hour or so. I said I needed to go to the library. Notice, I did not say I planned to use the car to go to the library. I was careful not to tell a lie.

As soon as Mom and Dad left that night, I put on my black jeans, jacket, and ski mask. From the basement, I got the paint, a brush, and an old rag, in case I made a mistake and had to wipe off the rock.

I drove carefully. The last thing I wanted was to be noticed. I planned to take the side road that parallels the freeway. I would park there, climb over the fence, and scale the hill to the rock.

My heart knocked against my ribs like it wanted to escape. Sweat trickled down inside my black jacket. I took a couple of deep breaths, trying to calm myself. It was stifling inside that ski mask, but I didn't want to take it off when I was almost there. I decided to get a cold drink. If I used a straw, I could drink it through the mouth hole in the mask.

I pulled into the 7-11 parking lot, looked around to be sure I didn't see anyone I knew, and hopped out of the car. As I pushed open the door, a woman who was standing at the magazine rack, gasped. I figured she was reading some juicy gossip in *The National Enquirer.* I went past her toward the counter. The clerk, instead of asking what I wanted, backed away from me until she was flat against the wall.

I started to say, "Give me a large Coke, please," but I only got as far as "Give me" when two burly guys who were buying beer jumped me and pinned me to the floor.

One of them yelled, "Call the police!"

The clerk said, "I did. We have a silent alarm."

At that moment, three police officers rushed in.

"We got him," said the big ape who by then was sitting on my stomach.

I won't give you a play-by-play account of what happened next. It's too painful to remember. The synopsis is that the cops frisked me, questioned me, searched my car, took me to the station, and ultimately called my parents.

I had worried about what they would say if they found out I painted "Smile" on the rock. It was nothing compared to what they said when the cops called their bridge club and told them I had been picked up for allegedly trying to rob a 7-11. It didn't help when they insisted their son was at the library.

Reluctantly, I admitted my intent; the can of paint and the brush offered proof. No charge was filed and, eventually, I was allowed to leave.

I never did paint "Smile" on the rock. I didn't feel much like smiling anyway.

5

LET'S HEAR IT FOR THE ONE-PARENT FAMILY

It seems fashionable to blame society's ills on one-parent families. Numerous studies make a point of stating the high percentage of kids in trouble who live in one-parent homes. The implication is that two parents always raise responsible, law-abiding children, while one person raising kids alone is destined to produce nothing but juvenile delinquents.

I want to set the record straight. One person can do just as good a job of raising children as two people can. Even better. For one thing, it's more fair. A kid in a two-parent home is always outnumbered. I know. I live with both my parents, and it is always two of them and one of me. Family conferences are a joke.

It is discouraging to always be the minority vote. For example, my parents are dieting and they're both fond of fish. So what do we eat for dinner every night? You can bet it isn't macaroni and cheese, or pizza, or any of the other foods I vote for. No. We have tuna salad with no mayo, or poached halibut.

I said, "Let's have French fries on the side, just for the halibut." Nobody laughed. When you're dieting, you lose more than pounds; you lose your sense of humor.

My only hope of balancing the vote is if my parents have another baby, a decision over which I have absolutely no control.

Then there's the matter of privacy. A kid who lives with just one parent has some hope of occasionally spending time unsupervised. Not me. You'd think my parents were parole officers and I was a third-time offender, the way they keep track of my whereabouts. Not that I have anything to hide, but once in awhile it would be nice to be able to sit and stare into space without having my mother suggest that I go outside and shoot baskets.

She thinks I don't get enough fresh air. According to her, ample fresh air prevents acne, boredom, and assorted upper respiratory infections. My dad agrees, naturally.

I said if the air in our house is so polluted it causes acne, then maybe I should move in with my friend, Chris, who is allowed to watch all of the TV shows that I am not allowed to watch. Chris, by the way, lives with only his father and he has never been in trouble. Mom said if I wanted to see Chris, I could invite him over to shoot baskets with me, which I did. We had a blast playing Horse.

Theoretically, when two parents are on the scene, there are more opportunities for cultural enrichment than if only one parent is present. Maybe. My folks do take me to concerts, and I know what the inside of an art gallery looks like. But Chris and his dad go hiking, and they have a book about rocks, and they try to identify all the different kinds that they find. Chris has never been to the Opera House like I have, but he's been to the band concerts in the park on Sunday afternoons. And he does know a lot about agate and quartz and something called Fool's Gold. He even has a fossil collection.

Would I change places with Chris? Do I really want to live in a one-parent home?

Which parent?

No. Despite the diet dinners and the fresh air nagging and the minority vote at family conferences, I can't imagine living with only one of my parents.

The odd thing is: Chris says he can't imagine having someone besides his dad around all the time.

As I said, the surveys are wrong. It isn't important how many parents you live with. What matters is whether they love you.

6

HAPPY ENDINGS

Once upon a time there was a little kid—me—who believed in fairy stories. I believed there really was a Peter Rabbit. I believed that somewhere in a far-away castle, Sleeping Beauty and her Prince were living happily ever after. I even believed that seven dwarfs still marched off to work in the mines every morning, cheerfully whistling.

Life was simpler back in my once-upon-a-time years. When I looked at the pictures in my books, I had faith that the whole world would somehow have a happy ending.

I was ten when I learned that real life is different from fiction. That's how old I was when my mom and dad got a divorce. They were civil about it, and they both tried to spend time with me and my sister. They told us the divorce didn't have anything to do with how they feel about us. As Mom put it, they tried to "minimize the impact on the children."

The trouble is, even with minimizing the impact, that divorce felt like a wheelbarrow load of cement on my shoulders. I understood why they did it, but I wished they hadn't. I wished they could have lived happily ever after.

The accident happened when I was twelve. A station wagon sideswiped my sister's bike. She has a limp now—she will always have a limp—and I realized that sometimes bad things happen through no fault of our own. Innocent people are victims.

There was a whole series of misfortunes that year. Besides Shannon's accident, my Grandma broke her hip, and our cat, Rhino, died, and my best friend, Jackie, moved to North Dakota. It was a rotten year.

One day, when I was feeling really down, I started to clean out my closet. I found all of my old picture books, and I spent a couple of hours reading them again.

At first, as I paged through the familiar stories, I felt cynical, thinking I had been purposely misled as a child. But the more I read, the more I relaxed. I cheered once again as Jack raced down the beanstalk and escaped from the giant. I laughed at the foolish wolf in Grannie's clothing, confident that he would soon get his comeuppance from the wood chopper. The familiar pictures comforted me.

My spirits soared because Peter Rabbit and Snow White and Red Riding Hood were alive and well in my imagination. No matter what disasters happen in reality, my pretend friends will never change.

Re-reading my childhood books taught me something else. Although real life is sometimes sad, in my mind I can create whatever kind of world I choose. I can remember how silky Rhino's fur felt when I petted him, and how he rumbled when he purred. I can write to Jackie. Now that Shannon doesn't take ballet lessons anymore, we have time to work on the doll house that we're building together. Through the power of imagination and love, I can overcome the sad events and turn them into joys.

Perhaps that's why I love my books. They have taught me to appreciate the good things that happen and to do what I can to make every ending a happy one. "Once upon a time" is still the doorway to a magical world and, in some ways, I will always be a little kid who believes in fairy stories.

7

UNPAID BABY SITTER

I have to baby-sit my little brothers again tonight. It isn't fair! Just because I'm the oldest, why do I have to take care of them all the time? I suggested that I ought to at least get paid for baby-sitting, but my dad said every family member is expected to contribute what they can, and the best thing I can contribute right now is to take care of my brothers.

My little brothers sure as heck don't contribute anything. P.J. makes messes wherever he goes, and Michael whines all the time. This would have been a great family if I had been an only child, but my parents failed to see that until it was too late.

I think there are child labor laws that prohibit adults from taking advantage of kids my age. I don't think my parents know about them.

I've been keeping track of my hours. Last month, I took care of my brothers for eighteen hours. If I had spent eighteen hours baby-sitting someone else's kids, I'd have enough money to buy that sweater I want. But, no. I'm the unpaid slave labor.

I plan to continue keeping track of my time. There's no hope that I'll ever be properly reimbursed for it, but at least I have proof in writing of how I am taken advantage of.

Tonight I even have to feed them their dinner, which is a royal pain. P.J.'s idea of fun is to fingerpaint in spaghetti sauce. And Michael refuses to eat anything unless you pour half a bottle of ketchup on it first. He puts ketchup on oatmeal. He puts ketchup on fruit salad. He even makes little sandwiches out of two chocolate chip cookies, with ketchup as the filling. It is totally disgusting to watch my brothers eat.

After they have dinner, they're supposed to take a bath. It's necessary to get the spaghetti sauce out of P.J.'s hair and the ketchup out from under Michael's fingernails. Their bath water always looks like someone is bleeding to death.

Then I read them stories. Actually, that part of the baby-sitting is fun, because I read them all the books that were my favorites when I was their age.

After they go to bed tonight, I get to watch a video that Dad rented for me on his way home. It's one I've been wanting to see. I've already set the clock in the living room ahead a half an hour, so Michael will think it's his bedtime before it really is. That way, I can watch my video sooner.

Maybe I can pack my lunch for tomorrow while the monsters play in their dinner. I see Mom remembered to buy my favorite kind of bread and some fresh pears, which I love. It's a good thing I'll have a big lunch tomorrow, since eating dinner with my brothers will spoil my appetite tonight.

I'm going to wear my new dress tomorrow, too. Mom finished hemming it today. I really like the material, even though we found it at a half-price sale. We never buy anything unless it's on sale because, to quote my father, "Our budget is rather lean." It's a good thing Mom likes to sew, or I'd probably be going to school naked.

If I think about my new dress and my fresh pear and my video while I do brat duty tonight, maybe it won't seem so bad. Still, it really isn't fair for me to have to baby-sit all the time for nothing.

8

TEENAGE STRESS

I went to the doctor yesterday. I keep breaking out in a rash, like hives, only I'm not allergic to anything and I didn't touch any poisonous plants and I didn't get bit by an insect. The doctor said my rash is caused by stress.

When I told my dad, he said, "Stress? What do you have to be stressed about?"

I said, "Homework."

Dad laughed. According to him, the teen years are the most carefree time of anyone's life. He says I won't know what stress is until I'm an adult and paying my own bills.

The truth is, I'm stressed about a lot of things, but homework is the only one I could mention to my father. For example, I'm stressed because I really like Jennifer Powell and I want to go out with her, but I can't because my best friend, Randy, went out with her a couple of times and he likes her, too. Jennifer has let me know she'd like to go out with me, but how can I date her when I know how Randy feels? If I take Jennifer out, Randy will be hurt, and I'll lose a good friend. If I don't take Jennifer out, I'll lose the chance to date someone I really care about. Talk about stress!

Then there's the matter of Brian Hagley's cheating. Every time we take a test in math, Brian cheats. Sometimes he looks at my paper and copies down the answers; sometimes he looks at Randy's paper and copies down the answers. If we cover our answers, he peeks at someone else's paper. We have never taken a math test where Brian didn't cheat.

My mother and Brian's mother sing in a choral group together. Whenever I go to one of Mom's concerts, Mrs. Hagley says that Brian always speaks highly of me and she's glad he and I are friends. So should I turn him in or not? Would the other kids think I'm a tattletale? Am I doing him a favor to let him get away with cheating?

Stress is everywhere. I *breathe* stress when I get up in the morning. I'm trying to find a summer job. Is there anything in the entire world more stressful than applying for a job? My hands sweat so much I can hardly hold the pen to fill out the job application. I have reasonable verbal skills—until I'm talking to a potential employer. Then I have a speech handicap which causes me to blurt out inappropriate responses to crucial questions. For example, I applied for a job at The Fried Chicken Roost. The manager asked me if I had ever bussed dishes, and I said, "No. I always carry them on my bicycle." He smiled politely, but I knew immediately that I would not be working at The Fried Chicken Roost.

No wonder I have a rash. I will probably never get a job. When I'm forty-three years old, I will still be filling out job applications at Dairy Queen and McDonalds and making stupid jokes to the proprietors. At least by then, people will admit I have a reason to feel stressed.

It is stressful just to be a teen. Adults look at us as if we were dope pushers or delinquents. If I cut my hair different than the older generation, or wear untraditional clothing, adults look away when they see me on the street. They act like being young is a contagious disease even though they all try to look younger.

The worst stress of all comes from not knowing who I am. Oh, I know my name and address and who my family is and all of that, but who am I? What do I want to do with my life? What are my goals, besides getting a summer job? What are my talents? What do I want to be doing ten years from now? Will the world be a better place because of me? How?

Sometimes I am so full of questions that I think I'll break apart into a thousand pieces. I never do, though. Instead I break out in a thousand little red bumps that itch.

The doctor said if I look on the bright side of everything, I wouldn't feel the stress. I tried to figure out what the bright side is. I decided the bright side of teenage stress is this: By the time I'm twenty, I'll outgrow it.

9

MY MOTHER IS SIXTEEN YEARS OLD

My mother is sixteen years old. Not in *real* years, of course. My mother's true age is thirty-eight, a nice respectable number for a mother to be.

Unfortunately, my mom still thinks of herself as sixteen. What's worse, she tries to act that way. If I have a friend over and we're sitting around listening to music and talking, my mom sits with us.

Yesterday, my friend, Betsy, was telling me about this new guy she met and how she thinks he might ask her out, and my mom walked in and listened and then she started telling Betsy about a new guy who just got hired at the firm where she works and how she wouldn't be surprised if he asked her out one of these days. It was embarrassing.

I do not want a sixteen-year-old mother. I know Mom gets lonely, and I know she doesn't have much time for a social life, but I don't want my friends to be her friends. Don't misunderstand me; I want Mom to like my friends, and I want them to like her, but that isn't the same as getting all chummy-wummy with them.

When I go to Betsy's house, her mother says hello and sometimes talks to me for a minute or two, but that's it. If Betsy's mother has a new man in her life, she keeps the news to herself, and she never asks me personal questions.

On the day after the Homecoming Dance, my mom asked Betsy if her date had kissed her. I could have died! Betsy had already told me all about it, but she sure didn't want to tell my mother. She mumbled something under her breath and then Mom launched into a long story about her first kiss.

I suppose if I had brothers or sisters, or if Mom and Dad hadn't gotten divorced, it might be different. As it is, it's been just Mom and me for so many years that I guess she's come to depend on me for companionship. Now that I have other people who are important to me, she wants them to be important to

her, too. And she wants to be special to them.

I don't like to hurt her feelings by asking her to leave my friends and me alone. But it's either that, or my friends are not going to come to my house anymore.

Why can't parents grow up gracefully, instead of trying to relive their youth through their kids?

I don't want a thirty-eight-year-old pal. I just want a mother.

10

LETTER FROM CAMP

(This monolog, even when memorized, should be done while holding a tablet and pencil, as if you were writing.)

Dear Folks: I thought I'd better write to you before you get the hospital bill. Otherwise, you might worry. Mr. Higgins is OK except for the stitches, which will come out next week. Before you start lecturing me about driving when I don't have a license yet, I want to explain that none of it was my fault. Not the fire. Not the loose boa constrictor. And not the garbage can crashing through the window. As you have always told me, there is a logical explanation for everything. You'll be glad to know I am learning you were right about that.

You were also right when you said I would like this camp if I would give it half a chance. I was afraid it would be boring. I thought there would be counselors all over the place and strict curfews, and we'd have to do dumb stuff like go on hikes and learn crafts. Boy, was I wrong! Next year, can I sign up for the whole summer instead of just one month? I thought I would be lonesome, but I'm not. Did you know there is a camp for girls just across the river? It only takes twenty minutes to row over there. Even less in daylight.

I am getting off the subject; I started to explain about the hospital bill. It all started yesterday afternoon when this guy named Boston said he had found a chain saw and asked if I wanted to help him cut down a tree. I said I had never used a chain saw, but I'd be glad to help since the reason my folks sent me to camp was to learn new skills. By the way, don't you think Boston is a terrific name? He was born while his parents were on a trip to Massachusetts. I said it's a good thing they were not vacationing in New York; they might have named him Buffalo. He said he's always wished they had gone to Minnesota. People might treat him with more respect if his name was Saint Paul.

How would you feel if I changed my name to something more interesting, like Dallas? I think Dallas has a real nice sound and if people think I'm from Texas, so what? Maybe I'll learn to talk with a southern accent. As a matter of fact, I already am.

One of the guys in my cabin has a drawl. He's from Atlanta. He says stuff like, "Y'all come see me, hea?" At first I had a hard time understanding him, but now that I'm used to it I like his accent. A drawl has more character than ordinary speech. It is also contagious. Do not be surprised if I have a drawl when I come home, even though this camp is not in the south. When you live in the same cabin with someone who says "y'all," it's nearly impossible not to say it, too.

His name is Jem, and he taught us how to cook cajun hot dogs. You'll be happy to know that I am no longer a picky eater. All those reminders you gave me about tasting everything once, even if it's not what we eat at home, must have had some effect on my subconscious mind because I've eaten lots of stuff we never had at home. It's all been at night, not during regular meals, but what's the difference as long as I'm learning to like a variety of food? My favorite, besides the cajun hot dogs, is something called Gut Buster's Orgy. It's made with crushed potato chips, maple syrup, dill pickles, melted chocolate bars, peanut butter, ketchup, raisins, and a couple of other things I can't remember. I'll try to write down the recipe so I can make it for you when I get home. Maybe I'll make it for Grandma's birthday, since she's always saying if I learned how to cook I wouldn't be so picky. The dentist that Mr. Higgins took me to says I'll have the new caps on my teeth before I go home, so I will be able to chew some Gut Buster's Orgy on both sides of my mouth again. Maybe for Grandma I will call it something more delicate, like Tummy Tickler's Delight, even though orgy is one of my new words. I have become very aware of language since I got here. In fact, my vocabulary is growing rapidly. Some of the words I never heard before. Some I had wondered

about because I saw them written in public places, but I didn't want to bother you by asking what they meant. Well, now I know, which should make you happy since you are always saying I should expand my mind.

I hope you are OK and not too lonely with the house all to yourselves. I am fine, as you can tell from this newsy letter, which I am sure you did not expect but, as I said at the start, I didn't want you to worry about me. I'll try to write again soon. I just realized I haven't told you about the poison yet, but that will have to wait until my next letter because the sheriff just got here and I am one of the people who has to testify.

Your loving son, Dallas.

P.S. Don't try to call. The electricity and telephone lines are still dead from when the tree fell the wrong way. Boston had never used a chain saw before, either.

11

MY FATHER NEVER HUGGED ME

If I ever have a kid of my own; I'm going to be a lot different with him than my parents are to me. If my kid wants me to play catch with him, I'll never say, "Not now. Can't you see I'm busy?"

If my kid doesn't like carrots, I'll never make him sit at the table until he eats at least one spoonful.

If my kid is talking to his friend on the telephone, I won't butt in after only ten minutes and tap my finger on my watch to signal that he has to hang up now.

And I'll hug my kid at least once a day. My father has never hugged me. When I was little, he didn't hug me when he put me to bed or when he left to go to work or when he came home. Not even when I was two years old and fell down the front steps and cracked my head on the sidewalk.

Whenever I tried to crawl into his lap, he pushed me away and told me to go play with my trucks. When I got older, if I tried to put my arm around his shoulder, he shrugged me off and said, "None of that sissy stuff."

I remember asking him to read me a story once and when he said he would, I sat down on the sofa next to him, snuggling as close as I could. He moved away. I felt like I must have little crawly green germs that would travel from my body to his if he wasn't cautious.

My friend, Jeff, says his father never hugs him, either, but he doesn't care. Jeff says he wishes his mom and his Aunt Esther would quit trying to hug him so much. He says getting hugged by Aunt Esther is like being smothered with a huge feather pillow.

When I was four, I got a stuffed elephant for my birthday. I named him Peanuts, and I carried him everywhere. Every night, I fell asleep with my arms around Peanuts, hugging him as tight as I could. Somehow, hugging Peanuts every night made up for not getting any hugs in the daytime. We moved when I was ten. As I was unpacking my things in the new apartment, I couldn't find Peanuts. I asked Mom if she knew where he was packed, and she said, "That old moth-eaten elephant? I threw it out. You're too old for such baby toys."

That's another thing I'll never do to my kid. I'll never throw anything of his away without asking him first.

If someone gives him money for his birthday, I'll let him spend it on anything he wants. I'll never make him put it in a savings account. If he wants to blow the whole thing on candy or video games at the mall, I'll let him. And when it's all gone and he has nothing to show for it, I'll never say, "I told you so."

To be fair, I should tell you that my parents have done a lot for me. They sent me to camp every summer. They paid for trombone lessons. I had a swing set and a tricycle and, later, a ten-speed. I hope I can give my kid those expensive things, too, but even if I can't, I know I'll hug him a lot.

I'll always hug him a lot.

12

IT'S NOT MY FAULT

I get blamed for everything around here. If there was a tornado and the roof blew off our house and landed in Mexico, my family would probably say it was my fault. They'd say I should have realized the shingles were loose and nailed them down tighter.

No matter what happens, my parents point their fingers at me. I will give you an example. Last Saturday, I was supposed to mow the lawn. My parents went grocery shopping, and they said the lawn had better be mowed when they got home. Or else.

They never say or else what. They say, "Or else." I've never had the nerve to find out what "or else" means.

At any rate, they went off to the grocery store and I, being the dutiful kid that I am, went out to the garage to get out the lawn mower. As I passed my father's workbench, I noticed that the bird house he is building was nearly finished. It's really more of a bird condominium, with several separate entrances. He sawed and sanded for weeks and then spent more weeks painting it white with a decorative green trim. He even painted little names over the holes. "Mrs. Robin" and "The Sparrow Family."

Unfortunately, when I leaned over the bird house to admire it more closely, I bumped the upper shelf and knocked off a can of red paint, which opened and splattered all over the bird house. It was as if that bird house had developed a sudden case of measles.

I grabbed a rag and tried to wipe the paint off, but all it did was smear. Then I got some paint thinner and dabbed it on the spots. The paint thinner took off the red paint, but it also removed everything underneath it, right down to the bare wood.

I knew I was in big trouble. My only hope was to repaint the whole birdhouse before my dad got home. It wasn't easy. The biggest problem was that when I put fresh white paint over the red dots, the red wasn't quite dry yet, so the bird house ended up being pink.

I had just finished washing out the brush when my folks drove up. The first thing they noticed was the long grass. I couldn't tell them the real reason why I had not mowed the lawn so I said Skipper, our dog, had wanted to go out so I took him for a long walk on his leash. Skipper makes a good excuse because he will never contradict anything I say about him.

I got out the mower but before I even started it, my mother flagged me down and said she had just had a telephone call from Eric's mother. Eric had confessed that he and I were the ones who broke Mrs. Smithson's front window.

Here is what happened: Eric and I were sitting on his front steps, swapping baseball cards, when we heard a pitiful meowing. There was a kitten on Mrs. Smithson's roof. The poor thing looked half-starved, and it clearly did not know how to get down. Eric and I both knew we had to help that poor little cat.

I got a ladder. Eric held it steady while I climbed up. The kitten wouldn't come to me. Finally I got on the roof and chased it. Eric climbed up the ladder. I caught the kitten and tried to hand it to Eric, but the kitten clawed my arm and I yelled and dropped it on Eric's head, and he screamed and jumped and the ladder went crashing through the window. The broken glass set off Mrs. Smithson's burglar alarm. Eric and I were afraid we'd get arrested for breaking in. He put the ladder back up, I climbed off the roof, and we hightailed it for home. Later, when I was asked if I had seen anyone break that window, I said no, which was the truth. How could I see it when I was way up on the roof?

I couldn't believe that Eric had blabbed. My mother marched me over to Mrs. Smithson to apologize and to say that I would pay for the window out of my allowance. Mrs. Smithson came to the door, but before I could say one word, she snapped, "It's about time you got here. That dog has been harrassing my poor little cat all morning." It seems she had called our house several times to complain that Skipper was over in her yard. I didn't hear the phone because I was out in the garage. My mother didn't ask me how Skipper could be chasing Mrs. Smithson's cat while I was walking him on his leash, but she gave me a look that let me know I was about to find out what "or else" means.

We calmed Mrs. Smithson down and took Skipper home.

I planned to explain how the window was not my fault. The unmowed lawn was not my fault. But I had barely begun when I heard my father let out a war whoop in the garage. He had just seen his pink birdhouse. He did not even ask me if I had done it; he just started yelling at me.

Like I said, I get blamed for everything around here.

13

FIRST AND LAST BABY-SITTING JOB

Last night I had my first baby-sitting job. It will also be my last baby-sitting job. I've been wanting to baby-sit for a year but, until yesterday, nobody asked me. Then Mrs. Brideman, who knows my parents, called and asked Mom if I ever did any baby-sitting. She had an important meeting and her usual sitter had cancelled.

After Mom agreed to let me do it, she gave me a ten-minute lecture about being responsible. I promised not to use the Bridemans' phone unless it was an emergency and not to eat anything unless Mrs. Brideman specifically said I could and not to let Willie Brideman out of my sight for one second.

Since the Bridemans live only three blocks from us, I walked over. On my way, I saw a kid named Jerry Hooper who is a couple of grades ahead of me. He was riding his bike. He asked me where I was going and I told him, and he said he lives two doors down from the Bridemans.

I didn't talk anymore because I didn't want to be late to my first job, and besides, I haven't had much experience talking to boys outside of school, especially older ones, and it made me nervous.

I just got Willie in his pajamas and was reading him a story when someone knocked on the door. "Who is it?" I asked.

It was Jerry. Jerry Hooper. I opened the door and asked him what he wanted, and he said he had come to visit me. Willie said, "Hi, Jerry."

I said I didn't think he should come in when Mrs. Brideman wasn't home, but Jerry claimed he visited the Bridemans all the time. I wondered why Mrs. Brideman had not asked Jerry to babysit, instead of calling me.

"Did Mrs. Brideman say you couldn't have company?" Jerry asked. I admitted she had not said that. Willie ran and got his ball and handed it to Jerry, but I told him that Jerry wasn't coming in.

Willie started to cry. Jerry stepped inside and told him not to cry, that he would play ball with him. Jerry picked up the ball and tossed it. Willie tried to throw it back. It hit a lamp and knocked it over. The lamp shattered. Willie *really* cried then. It was past his bedtime, and nothing I could do or say calmed him down. Finally, I put him in his highchair and gave him a bowl of ice cream. He yowled harder.

Jerry and I were trying to sweep up the broken glass when Mrs. Brideman came home. Willie was still screaming. By then, I wasn't sure if he was crying over the broken lamp or because the ice cream felt cold in his hair. Mrs. Brideman told Jerry to leave, picked Willie up and comforted him, and informed me that she would never ask me to baby-sit again. Worst of all, she called my mom and said that I had invited my boyfriend over while she was gone. Mom ranted and raved like I had tied Willie Brideman to a chair and tortured him. She didn't even want to hear my side of what had happened.

The next day, after she had calmed down a little, Mom said she didn't know I had a boyfriend. I told her I don't. I said Mrs. Brideman jumped to the wrong conclusion, based on circumstantial evidence. Then I explained exactly what had happened. Well, Mom got angry all over again, only this time she wasn't mad at me, she was mad at Jerry for going in the house after I told him not to and at Mrs. Brideman for assuming I had invited him.

I feel better about the whole mess now that Mom is on my side. I know one thing: If I ever get another baby-sitting job, which seems unlikely, I will lock the door and refuse to open it no matter who is on the other side.

14

REMEMBERING BOO-BOO

The oddest things remind me of Boo-Boo. For instance, the ocean. Boo-Boo was such a little dog and the ocean is so vast—yet I can never walk along the beach without seeing in my memory a small, black dog, skimming along the sand with his tail streaming out behind him.

He never actually went in the water. I think he was secretly afraid of the waves, although he would growl and bark fiercely at them if they came too close. Watching him race along the shore, I always felt free, too, as if all the invisible leashes that restrain me had been, for a short time, removed.

I remember Boo-Boo on hot summer days, when I abandon the mower and take a quick nap in a lawn chair. Boo-Boo's attitude about naps was straightforward. To him, they were necessities, not luxuries, particularly if the nap could be taken in the sun. In winter, he made do with patches of sun coming through the windows, which necessitated frequent moves in order to stay on a bright patch of carpet. In summer, he snored grandly in a lawn chair. He got so warm, we nicknamed him The Black Panter, but he never wanted to sleep in the shade.

I had an argument with my best friend last week and, oddly, that also reminded me of Boo-Boo. I didn't have to scold Boo-Boo often, but when I did, he was devastated, slinking about with his head down and his tail between his legs, looking mournful. He always wanted to make up as quickly as possible. If I ignored him, he crept toward me, tail wagging tentatively, and licked my shoe. How can you stay mad at someone who's willing to lick your shoe? After John and I quarreled, we didn't talk to each other for two days. Then I decided I would be like Boo-Boo and make the first move, regardless of who was at fault. Instead of staying away, I walked up to John and said I missed him and wanted to be friends again. He grinned and gave me a hug and said he was sure glad to hear that.

Come to think of it, Boo-Boo knew the right thing to do in lots of situations. When I had the flu and thought my stomach was going to turn inside out, my folks tried to cheer me up with a lot of chatter about how I would feel better soon. Boo-Boo just lay quietly beside me, as if to say, "I'm here if you need me, but I won't bother you." I remembered that when my uncle had cancer surgery, I went to the hospital and sat in the lobby for five hours. I didn't bother anyone; I just sat there. Later, my aunt thanked me about ten times and said it was a great comfort to her to know that if she wanted someone to talk to, I was there. "How did you know exactly the right thing to do?" she asked. I just shrugged; I didn't tell her Boo-Boo taught me.

When the neighborhood gang used to play hide-and-seek, I always had to shut Boo-Boo in the house. Otherwise, he gave away my hiding place. No matter where I hid, Boo-Boo would sniff me out and then dance exuberantly in front of my hiding place. He couldn't holler, "I spy," but he sure knew a lot about nonverbal communication.

Boo-Boo was already five years old when I was born. He was a part of my life for twelve years. When people said I was an only child, my folks always shook their heads and said, "Don't forget Boo-Boo."

I won't ever forget Boo-Boo. We shared a bed, and countless games of tuggy-rag, and more than one Girl Scout cookie. From him, I learned about trust and loyalty and when to keep my mouth shut. I learned that a mixed heritage can produce a sterling personality. I learned that enthusiasm gets results and forgiveness is better than sulking. I learned it's more important to have someone who loves you than it is to always win the game. And I learned that, for every creature, there is a time for living and a time for dying.

Boo-Boo taught me one other thing: There is no end to love, because happy memories remain forever in the heart.

You can't ask much more than that of a dog.

15

FREE ICE CREAM ALL SUMMER

Last May, the local ice cream store had a special promotion. Every time anyone bought an ice cream cone during the month of May, they got a little red ticket with a number on it. There was a drawing scheduled, and the winning number would get free ice cream for the whole summer. Two quarts per week for three months.

I imagined a glorious summer, pigging out on free ice cream. What bliss! What ecstasy! I daydreamed about it for a whole month, seeing myself with huge bowls heaped with Blackberry Marble or Triple Chocolate Fudge Delight. It nearly happened, too. In fact, it should have happened. If I didn't have a traitor for a sister, it *would* have happened.

My sister, Bev, and I bought a lot of ice cream cones during May, to get as many tickets as we could. Each time, Bev ordered first because she always knew what she wanted and I didn't. She got Banana Walnut every time, which I thought showed lack of originality and poor taste. Banana Walnut is the only kind of ice cream I don't like.

While Bev got her Banana Walnut cone, I would read the list of flavors and peer through the glass freezer top at the open containers of ice cream and try to decide. Because she always went first, Bev's number each time was one digit before mine. If she got number 15, I had number 16. When she got number 43, I got 44.

The drawing was held June first. When I got home from my paper route that day, Bev was waiting for me. I've never seen her so excited. "You won!" she screamed, before I was even in the house. "We get free ice cream all summer."

"How do you know?" I asked.

Bev said she went to the ice cream store to see if the winning number had been selected. There was a big sign in the window: Number 114 Wins Free Ice Cream All Summer. Bev said she ran home and looked at all her tickets and when she came to number 113, she knew that I had the winner because I always got the next number after hers.

I jumped around, grinning and shaking my hands in the air. I even hugged my sister. I was going to have all the Strawberry, Pistachio, and Almond-Butter-Crunch ice cream I could eat. Maybe I would get a different flavor every week for the entire summer. I'd been wanting to try Licorice/Marshmallow and Peanut Butter Broccoli.

Bev said, "All you have to do is take ticket number 114 down to the store and turn it in, and we are in ice cream heaven for the next three months." She emphasized the word *we.*

I quit jumping and grinning. I said, "What do you mean, I have to turn in the ticket?"

Bev gave me the look that she always gives me when she thinks I'm acting like a retarded two-year-old. "Of course you have to turn in the winning number," she said. "How else does the ice cream store know you're the one who has it?"

At that moment, I felt exactly the way I did when the dentist announced I needed braces. I looked at my shoes and kept my mouth shut. My dismay must have been obvious because Bev said, "Don't tell me you didn't keep your numbers. Oh, no! Even you can't be that stupid." When I didn't reply, she continued: "You threw them away, didn't you?" I nodded miserably. She said, "And the garbage got picked up yesterday. Free ice cream for the entire summer and my idiot brother throws it away."

Bev can get worked into quite a froth when she gets started. I decided not to stick around and watch. I told her I didn't save the numbers on purpose. "Ice cream," I informed her, "is not on my improved low-fat nutrition plan for the summer. Even if I had the winning ticket, I would not turn it in." That wasn't true, of course, but it made me feel better to say it. Mustering every shred of dignity I could, I stomped away.

An hour later, as I sat on the back porch debating whether to cry or make popcorn, Bev joined me. She had a quart of

Banana Walnut ice cream and a spoon. She was gobbling it straight from the carton.

When I asked her where she got the money for a whole quart of ice cream, she told me it was free. The way she said it made me suspicious. I knew she was setting me up, but I was too curious not to ask *how* she got a free quart of ice cream.

"I thought about you throwing away all your tickets," she said, "and it dawned on me that you might not have thrown them in the garbage. Maybe they went in the recycle box. So I dumped all the paper out of the recycle box and rummaged around, and what do you think I found? Ticket number 114."

I glared at her. Number 114 was *my* ticket.

She said, "I knew you didn't want it, since ice cream is not on your improved low-fat nutrition plan for the summer, so I turned it in myself. I got to choose which flavors I want. I signed up for two quarts of Banana Walnut every week for three whole months. This is the first one." She dipped her spoon into the container and said, "It's going to be a wonderful summer."

Bev was wrong.

It was a terrible summer.

16

FAMILY TALK

Sometimes I feel as if I live under a microscope. Every word I say, and every action I take, is carefully examined by my parents. Even worse, they tell other people all about me. I have no secrets.

For the first few years of my life, I thought I was invisible. My parents discussed me with other people as if I wasn't there, while I stood right in front of them. They would never do that to another adult. I vividly remember my mother and my Aunt June talking about the cute things I did and said. I loved hearing them tell how cute I was. It made me want to do those same things over and over.

Just as vividly, I remember my mother and my grandmother discussing how naughty I was. Mother listed everything I had done in recent weeks that I should not have done. I jumped on the sofa. I pulled the cat's tail. I carried my juice into the living room and spilled it. Instead of taking a nap, I stripped all the blankets and sheets off my crib and threw them on the floor. I put Cheerios in the dishwasher. On and on it went. Most of the complaints were about things I didn't know were wrong until after I had done them. Even though my mother laughed as she told Grandma all this, I felt diminished, as if I had a serious character flaw, when I heard my mother relating all of my mistakes.

Eventually, my parents caught on that I was not deaf and that I was capable of understanding what they said about me. Then they started to spell. They said things like, "*(Name)* put an A-P-P-L-E down the T-O-I-L-E-T." I knew, of course, that they were discussing me, since they never bothered to spell out my name. This left me wondering what was so terrible, so horrible, that they could not talk about it in front of me. I imagined my parents were getting a divorce. I thought my older brother was dying. I thought the dog had been stolen. It took several weeks of these spelled-out conversations, with no unhappy occurrences in the family, before I caught on that they were merely talking about me, as they always had, but in a different way.

When I learned to spell, Mother resorted to whispering. She would wait until I was in the next room, lower her voice, and talk fast. One day, I charged into the living room and yelled, "If Grandma wants to know what I've been doing, I'll tell her. You don't need to whisper about me when I'm in the kitchen."

Mother looked shocked. It was as if it never dawned on her that I didn't like being gossiped about. Since that day, the problem hasn't been quite so bad. I'm sure my parents still discuss me when I'm not there, but at least they don't do it anymore when I'm present.

When I think how my private business has been spread all over town by my parents, it makes me furious. Mother tells my aunt and my grandma. My dad tells my uncle. Sometimes they both tell the people they work with, too. It's disloyal! When I ran my bike into a tree, everyone knew. When I fell asleep on the school bus and rode all the way to the bus barn, everyone knew. When I baked cookies and mistakenly used powdered mushroom instead of cinnamon, my mother could hardly wait to get on the phone.

What someone does in the privacy of their own home should not be discussed with other people, no matter how interesting it is, without that person's permission. I would never tell my friends the everyday things my mother and father do, no matter how funny or annoying they are. *(Slight pause)*

Or would I? I guess that's what I am doing right now.

17

SLUG SLIME AND OTHER ENDEARMENTS

My friend, Alexander, complains because he doesn't have a nickname. He's an only child and his parents have always called him Alexander, rather than Alex or Al. He says it's too formal. He says he wants to be PeeWee or Spike or something else that's completely unrelated to Alexander.

In my opinion, Alexander doesn't know how lucky he is. I'll bet it's been at least two years since any of my brothers have called me by my real name. They always call me things like Elephant Ears or Toe Jam or Diaper Delinquent. I told Alexander he was welcome to use any of the nicknames that my brothers call me, anytime he wants them. I told him he could choose from such gems as Ugly Face or Stink Bomb.

I've noticed that the names my brothers have for me are always two part. One word would be bad enough; I always get double whammies like Big Bottom or Garlic Breath or Jelly Belly.

I used to complain to my mother, but she always refused to get involved. She claims that family nicknames are actually expressions of endearment and should not be taken literally. I asked her how she could possibly believe that Slug Slime was an expression of endearment, but she just laughed and told me it was a good example of alliteration.

To her credit, I admit she refuses to get involved when my brothers complain to her about me, too. Not that they ever have anything serious to complain about.

It wouldn't be so bad to go through life being called Fanny Flab or Pimple Puss if they would confine their remarks to our own house. But, no. My brothers like nothing better than to call me revolting names in front of my friends. It's disgusting.

The other day, I was standing in front of the school talking to Merilee Putnam, who is the cutest girl in my entire grade and who had never before until that very moment noticed that I was alive. Merilee had just asked me if she could look at my history notes from the week she was sick, when one of my brothers went past. Now, any normal sibling, given such circumstances, would simply smile and keep going. Better yet, they would notice that I was a nervous wreck in the middle of the most important conversation of my life and pretend not to recognize me.

Not my brother. He grinned and said, "Hey, Liver Lips. How about introducing me to your friend?" Merilee just laughed, but I could have shot him.

I told Alexander about it the next day. I repeated how lucky he was not to have a bunch of bratty brothers to embarrass him with stupid nicknames.

There goes one of my brothers now. I guess I'll walk home with him. *(Yells.)* Hey, Garbage Odor! Wait for me! *(He exits.)*

18

MY HEAD IS FULL OF STARSHINE

My friend, Pam, says my head is full of starshine. She laughs when she says it. What she really means is that she doesn't always understand the poems I write, but she's glad that I write them. She means she recognizes that I'm not like her, but it's OK for me to be different.

Pam is practical. Every night before she goes to sleep, Pam makes a list of what she needs to do the next day. She puts down items like return library books and hem dress for Margo's party on Saturday. When the list is made, she numbers the items in order of importance. If it's critical, it's Number One. Pam has never had to pay an overdue fine at the library and when Saturday arrives, her dress will not only be hemmed, it will be washed, ironed, and ready to wear.

I have a long history of library fines. Twenty cents here, fifty cents there. I'm always amazed to notice that a book is overdue. It just never seems like three weeks could go by so quickly. When Saturday comes, I'll be rummaging frantically through my closet, hoping to find something decent to wear to the party. But I wrote a birthday poem for Margo that I like a lot. It took me two days; I think Margo will like it, too.

My mother often wonders aloud why I can't be more like Pam. Just once, according to my mother, it would be nice to know more than twenty-four hours in advance that your child is performing in a school concert. I always forget to bring home the notices, or else I write something on the back and stick them in my desk. Either way, Mom doesn't get them in time to make plans.

On my last report card, Mr. Evans, my science teacher, wrote that I am not working up to my potential. He said I tend to daydream, instead of paying attention in class. I have to admit that's true, especially when we were learning about insects. Pam found the unit on insects fascinating. Too fascinating, if you ask me. One day she sat beside me in the cafeteria and announced that ladybugs eat aphids, spider mites, whiteflies and mealybugs.

I said, “Yuck.”

Pam continued blissfully on, informing me that ladybugs eat several times their own weight in insects every day. I put down my peanut butter sandwich and told Pam that the conversation was not very appetizing, but she was so excited about ladybugs that she didn’t even hear me. She just babbled on about how even the ladybug larvae eat insects and how a company in California collects the ladybugs and sells them to fruit growers, to eat the aphids off the fruit trees. I finally moved to a different table, but by then my appetite was gone.

Pam got an A in science. I only get As in English. Some kids moan and complain whenever they have to write an essay or a story, but I love assignments like that. I have a whole notebook full of ideas for stories and poems that I intend to write someday. I also have a list of good titles. My favorite title is “Magic Mud in Kansas City,” but so far I haven’t been able to think of a story to go with it.

I will, though. I always do. Usually it happens when I least expect it, like when I’m sitting in science class trying not to get sick as I listen to how certain animals eat their young. When Mr. Evans talks about gross things like that, I pretend my chair is a flying carpet, and I watch myself float out the window, up past the flagpole and over the trees. Sometimes I pretend that I fly beyond the moon, to a different galaxy, where I meet wonderful creatures with purple beards who ride on giant rabbits.

Maybe Pam is right. My head is full of starshine. Except for those library fines, I’m glad it is.

19

NINTENDO HUMILIATION

Yesterday was absolutely the most mortifying day of my entire life. I was so embarrassed! And my own father caused the whole awful episode. Can you imagine a parent who is so unmerciful that he would humiliate his son in front of an entire group of people?

Here is what happened:

I was in my fifth period math class, which is taught by Mrs. Kipler, when someone knocked on the door. I should point out that math is not my strongest subject. I used to be good in math. In fact, I used to get mostly As and an occasional B in math. That was before this year, before I got Mrs. Kipler.

Don't get me wrong. I like Mrs. Kipler. She's an OK lady, and she has a sense of humor. She's even a good teacher. The problem is, she gives homework assignments every day, and I just don't have time to do all that homework. When I get home from school, I need to relax.

For the last few months, my relaxation has been Nintendo. I got my Nintendo at about the same time I started math with Mrs. Kipler.

I am good at Nintendo. You might even say I excel at Nintendo. If everyone has a natural talent, mine is Nintendo.

Unfortunately, I found it impossible to excel at Nintendo and to excel at math at the same time. Both require my time and attention after school.

The conflict came to light when I got my report card. When my father saw the D-minus in math, he asked me what was wrong. I explained about Mrs. Kipler and the daily homework assignments. Dad nodded and said nothing.

I said, "I simply do not have time for all that math homework."

Dad nodded and said nothing. I was astonished. I expected him to be a thunderstorm, glowering and rumbling for hours, drenching me with accusations and threats. Instead, he just sat there, calm and quiet as summer sunshine.

Lightning struck the next day. Like I said, I was sitting in Mrs. Kipler's fifth period math class when someone knocked on the door. It was my father. He carried my Nintendo.

"Hello," he said to Mrs. Kipler, sounding as cheerful as if he had come to hand out candy bars. "I'm *(Name)*'s father, and I've brought you his Nintendo."

My mouth fell open as I saw Dad hand my Nintendo to my teacher.

"I want you to keep it for him," Dad said, "until his grades improve."

"Oh, good," said Mrs. Kipler. "I'll take it home and play with it."

The other kids roared with laughter. You never heard such a commotion. You would have thought my father was the stand-up comic of the year. I wanted to slither out of my seat and slink away, but of course I had to sit there while the entire fifth-period math class pointed at me and hooted with laughter.

"You can decide when to give it back," Dad said. Then he smiled at Mrs. Kipler, nodded to me, and left.

Somehow, I lived through the rest of the day. When I got home that afternoon, I was lost without my Nintendo. I wandered through the house, feeling as if someone had died. There was nothing to do. I wasn't even hungry, which proves how traumatized I was. Eventually, I got so bored I did my math homework.

All of this happened six weeks ago. Yesterday we got report cards again. I got a B-plus in math. I also got my Nintendo back. Mrs. Kipler said she had not played with it, after all.

I took it home and, as soon as I finished my homework, I played for three straight hours. I'm happy to say I still have my talent. I still excel at Nintendo.

I'm pretty good at math, too.

20

GRANDMA THINKS I'M BEAUTIFUL

My grandma thinks I am beautiful. She can look straight at my flabby thighs and my frizzed hair and my knobby knees and still believe I'm the most gorgeous person alive.

Sometimes I tease her about it. I say, "Grandma, is something wrong with your eyesight? Have you had your glasses checked recently? There are two huge pimples on my nose, glowing like red lanterns. My ears are completely out of proportion to the rest of my head; they look like a pair of deformed mushrooms growing from the sides of my face. I would let my hair grow out to cover my ears except every hair on my head has a split end."

And do you know how she responds? Grandma laughs and says, "To me, you are beautiful. And don't you ever forget it."

Secretly, I'm glad that she has never let me talk her out of her opinion. It's comforting to know that no matter how ugly I am to the rest of the world, there's at least one person who thinks I look great. The funny thing is, when I'm with her, I *feel* more beautiful. I stand up straighter and keep my hair combed and wear clean clothes. Since she believes so hard that I am beautiful, I feel an obligation to at least try to live up to her expectations.

It isn't just my looks that Grandma applauds. It's everything about me. She says I'm smart. She's constantly amazed at the clever things I do. According to Grandma, I am well ahead of any other kid my age in reasoning ability, athletic skill and conversational artistry. To say nothing of my musical talent.

The truth is, I am average. I'm good at some things, not so good at others. If they had a universal curve for kids, overall I guess I'd place right about in the middle. Grandma would never admit that for a minute. She has always believed, and no doubt will continue to believe, that I'm right off the charts. Top dog. The genius kid of all time whose sterling character and sparkling personality match her sensational IQ.

Amazingly, she doesn't brag about me to her friends. Maybe she's afraid that if she started in on how clever I am, they would all want equal time to talk about their grandchildren.

She doesn't need to tell anyone else how she feels about me. The important thing is that she always lets *me* know how special I am: How bright and funny. How kind and fair. How honest and courageous. How beautiful.

Sometimes when I feel lazy and don't want to do my best at a difficult task, I think about Grandma and I try a bit harder. If I'm tempted to say something mean, I remember how good it feels to get a compliment, so I say something nice instead. When I think how proud Grandma will be if I do well in school, I'm never tempted to cheat or skip a test or neglect my homework. When you have a first-rate cheering squad, it makes you want to win the game. I don't ever want Grandma to be disappointed in me or ashamed of anything I do.

Every kid—and every adult—should have someone in their life who thinks they're beautiful. Most people would accomplish more and be happier, as well, if they could have my grandma, or someone like her, who firmly believes that they are wonderful and smart and kind.

Although I tease her about her eyesight and tell her she is hallucinating, I'm glad my grandma thinks I am beautiful.

I think she's beautiful, too.

Dialogs

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Every kid—and every adult—should have someone in their life who thinks they're beautiful. Most people would achieve more and be happier, as well, if they could have my grandma, or someone like her, who firmly believes that they are wonderful and smart and kind.

Although I tease her about her eyesight and tell her she is exaggerating, I'm glad my grandma thinks I am beautiful.

I think she's beautiful, too.

THE SLAVE

GOING FOR BROKE

WHOSE SIDE IS GOD ON?

I KNOW I FLUNKED THE HISTORY TEST

RIDING THE BIG BANANA

PRACTICALLY TWINS

A NORMAL FATHER-SON CONVERSATION

PROM NIGHT PARTY

I'LL BE THERE

HUMAN BEANS

THE UGLIEST HAIR IN THE WORLD

PAST INJUSTICES

WILL I KILL YOU, IF I HAVE TO?

BASEBALL FANATIC

NEW WAYS TO SAY NO

FLOWERS WON'T BRING BILLY BACK

FRIENDS FOREVER

STICKS AND STONES

ALL I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS IS TO NOT BE PREGNANT

THE LAST DAY OF SCHOOL: TWO VIEWPOINTS

21

THE SLAVE

CAST: Two female players, Maggie and Laura.

SETTING: Optional.

(MAGGIE and LAURA enter.)

MAGGIE: Do you want to come over on Saturday? We could do my new aerobics video and make brownies.

LAURA: I can't. Jason has a softball game.

MAGGIE: What time is his game?

LAURA: It starts at ten, but it's a double-header so we'll be there all day.

MAGGIE: What do you do while he plays softball?

LAURA: Watch.

MAGGIE: All day? It sounds boring.

LAURA: It is. I mean, I like to watch him play, but there's nobody to talk to and sometimes the games go on and on forever.

MAGGIE: Come over to my house instead. I guarantee: no boredom.

LAURA: Jason really wants me to go to all his games.

MAGGIE: Why? You don't sit with him, do you?

LAURA: Oh, no. If there are bleachers, I sit there. Otherwise, I just sit in the grass.

MAGGIE: Since you don't actually spend the time with him, he shouldn't care if you show up or not. Why don't you meet him after his games on Saturday?

LAURA: I could ask him, but I don't think he'll let me.

MAGGIE: Ask him?! Let you?! Is he your boyfriend or your father?

LAURA: I don't want to hurt his feelings.

MAGGIE: I don't see why coming over to my house would hurt his feelings. Maybe we could experiment with our hair, too.

LAURA: Jason likes my hair this way. But I'll ask about

Saturday.

MAGGIE: What if he says no?

LAURA: *(Shrugs)* Then I'll go watch his softball games.

MAGGIE: Do you know what the date is?

LAURA: Sure. It's *(Use actual date, such as January 10th)*.

MAGGIE: I mean the year. The century. Because you talk as if you are the slave and Jason is the master and you have never heard of personal freedom.

LAURA: You don't understand. Jason's just sensitive, that's all, and I want to make him happy.

MAGGIE: What about you? Why doesn't he want to make you happy?

LAURA: He does make me happy.

MAGGIE: It doesn't sound that way to me. If he wanted you to be happy, he would tell you that he'd like you to watch him play softball but if you have something you'd rather do, it's OK.

LAURA: You've never dated a college man. You don't understand.

MAGGIE: I understand that you're letting Jason control your life. Just because he's three years older and already in college doesn't mean he should boss you around.

LAURA: I don't want to argue about it. Let's talk about something else.

MAGGIE: Fine. Let's talk about the pep rally. Do you have any ideas for a skit?

LAURA: I'm not going to the pep rally.

MAGGIE: Why not? That's always one of the best events of the year. *(Gives LAURA a suspicious look.)* Don't tell me Jason won't let you.

LAURA: The pep rally is the same night as Jason's band concert.

MAGGIE: And he wants you in the audience, to watch him play.

LAURA: I want to be in the audience.

MAGGIE: More than you want to be in the pep rally?

LAURA: I just wish they weren't both at the same time.

MAGGIE: Remember how much fun we had at the pep rally last year? Remember the baby bottle contest?

LAURA: *(Giggles)* And the lip synch that the seniors did?

MAGGIE: And Mr. Randell dressed up like a woman? *(They both laugh.)* Are you sure you'd rather go to a band concert?

LAURA: I already told Jason I would.

MAGGIE: You know something? When you first started going out with Jason, I was a little jealous. A college man seemed so sophisticated. But now I feel sorry for you.

LAURA: That's ridiculous. I love being Jason's girlfriend.

MAGGIE: You're missing half the fun of high school. You can never do anything with your friends anymore because you always have to be Jason's shadow.

LAURA: I don't have to be with Jason. I choose to be.

MAGGIE: Why? Because you're flattered that an older guy wants to go out with you?

LAURA: I like Jason. I think I might even love him.

MAGGIE: What about him? If he loves you, he sure has a funny way of showing it.

LAURA: Jason is very nice to me.

MAGGIE: When you date someone, you should be friends. Equals. You seem more like his pet, waiting around for a pat on the head.

LAURA: That isn't true.

MAGGIE: Does he ever ask your opinion? Does he ever give up his plans in order to do what you want to do? *(LAURA turns away, looking hurt.)* Sorry. I haven't any right to criticize Jason. It's just that you and I used to have such good times and we don't anymore.

LAURA: I haven't meant to ignore you.

MAGGIE: I know that. And I'm glad if Jason makes you happy. But will you do one thing for me? The next time you have a conflict between what Jason wants you to do and something else, ask yourself which one *you* really want. Don't just automatically do what he wants.

LAURA: When you care about someone, you don't mind giving up your own plans now and then in order to make that person happy.

MAGGIE: Now and then—or the rest of your life?

LAURA: You know what you said about being jealous when I first started going out with Jason? *(MAGGIE nods yes.)* Well, I think you still are.

MAGGIE: *(Softly)* No. Not anymore. I'm much too fond of pep rallies. *(Looks Off-stage.)* Oh. There's Andrea. I think I'll see if she wants to come over Saturday. See you later. *(She exits.)*

LAURA: *(Watches MAGGIE leave. Speaks wistfully.)* To do aerobics and make brownies.

22

GOING FOR BROKE

CAST: Two college freshmen roommates, NANCY and GLENDA. NANCY is from an upper-middle-class family; GLENDA is from an impoverished background.

SETTING: The scene is their dormitory room.

AT RISE: NANCY is packing a suitcase. GLENDA is studying.

NANCY: What time are you leaving?

GLENDA: I'm not going anywhere.

NANCY: Tomorrow is Thanksgiving. Aren't you going home?

GLENDA: No.

NANCY: *(Incredulous)* You're staying here for Thanksgiving vacation?

GLENDA: It costs too much to go home.

NANCY: Well, then come home with me. Quick. Pack a bag. My brother's picking me up in front of the dorm in ten minutes.

GLENDA: I can't do that.

NANCY: Of course you can. My folks won't care. My brother is always bringing extra people home on a holiday; my parents love to have a crowd.

GLENDA: I have to stay here.

NANCY: You want to eat Dorm Glop on Thanksgiving? You're out of your mind. Besides, you'll be all alone; nobody stays here on Thanksgiving. Everyone goes home.

GLENDA: Not me. It won't be so bad. I'll get a lot of studying done.

NANCY: We can study together at my house. First we'll stuff ourselves with turkey, dressing, mashed potatoes, cranberry sauce, sweet potato casserole, Mom's homemade biscuits, green beans, Brussels sprouts, and pumpkin pie with real whipped cream, not that imitation stuff that they pass off as whipped cream in the dorm dining room. And then, just when you feel like you'll burst, Mom passes a bowl of chocolate mints that are absolutely irresistible. We'll have to diet all next week, but it will be worth it.

GLENDA: That isn't studying. That's an orgy.

NANCY: After we eat, we can crash on the living room floor and study.

GLENDA: Sure we will.

NANCY: I didn't say we will. I said we could. Come on, Glenda. Jason will bring us back Sunday night. There's plenty of room in his car for you. And I have twin beds in my room.

GLENDA: I appreciate the offer, but I can't.

NANCY: It's unpatriotic to eat Dorm Glop on Thanksgiving. No self-respecting Pilgrim would eat Macaroni Surprise.

GLENDA: I don't think the Pilgrims ate chocolate mints, either.

NANCY: My brother's single. And cute.

GLENDA: I'd love to come. I really would. But I have to work on Friday and Saturday.

NANCY: Tell them you're going home. Surely Jacobson's Craft Store can survive for one measly weekend without you.

GLENDA: I'm sure they could survive nicely without me. The trouble is, I can't survive without them. Without their paycheck, that is.

NANCY: You won't get fired for taking two days off. You can call them from my house on Friday morning and say you're sick. That won't be a lie.

GLENDA: Oh?

NANCY: You'll be sick of working while everyone else has a holiday. They won't fire you for getting sick. You know they won't.

GLENDA: *(Shakes her head no.)* I can't.

NANCY: Sure, you can. All you have to do is . . .

GLENDA: You don't understand. Even if I knew I wouldn't get fired—and I don't know that at all—I *need* the pay for those two days. Without it, I won't have enough for this month's room and board.

NANCY: That's no problem. I'll lend you the money. You can pay me back later.

GLENDA: I can't do that.

NANCY: Will you quit saying "I can't"? I'm telling you, grown men have been known to get down on their knees and plead for a piece of my mother's pumpkin pie. Opportunities like this only come once in a lifetime. Now, nod your head up and down and repeat after me: "Yes. I can do that."

GLENDA: I'm sorry, Nancy.

NANCY: Say it slowly and distinctly: "Yes. I can do that."

GLENDA: Thanks, anyway.

NANCY: Why should you miss out on one of the great Thanksgiving feasts of all time, to say nothing of the pleasure of my brother's company, just because your budget is a little tight this month?

GLENDA: My budget isn't tight this month; my budget is tight this year. My budget is tight this lifetime. I can't borrow money from you because I don't have any way to repay it.

NANCY: Why can't you repay it out of next month's salary?

GLENDA: I'll need next month's salary to pay next month's room and board. I know it's hard for you to realize this, but not everybody has the kind of money you have.

NANCY: I'm not exactly rich, you know. You make it sound like my family is rolling in money. *(GLENDA smiles and shrugs, but says nothing. This irritates NANCY.)* My folks aren't wealthy. Believe me, I know what it's like to be poor.

GLENDA: *(Quietly)* No, you don't.

NANCY: Oh, yes, I do. Last month, I was down to only seventy-five cents before my allowance check came. I couldn't even buy popcorn at the movies.

GLENDA: How much allowance do they send you?

NANCY: Fifty dollars a week.

GLENDA: And you couldn't afford popcorn?

NANCY: I have to buy my own clothes out of that. It isn't all fun money.

GLENDA: Two hundred dollars a month. I put in a lot of hours at Jacobson's for two hundred dollars.

NANCY: When my check finally got here, I was so relieved I practically cried. *(Again, GLENDA says nothing, but she rolls her eyes and shakes her head.)* You don't believe me? You think you're the only one who ever ran out of money?

GLENDA: No, I don't think I'm the only one. But I do know that you haven't any idea of what it's like to be poor.

NANCY: How can you say that? You act like being poor is some sort of elite club, and I can't be in it because of who my parents are.

GLENDA: You are crazy, girl. Do you know that? You are certifiably insane.

NANCY: That may be, but I also know what it's like not to have enough money. Don't think you're the only one who's ever had money problems.

GLENDA: Your money problems and my money problems are from two different planets.

NANCY: No money is no money. What's so different?

GLENDA: You are broke until your allowance check comes. I am broke until I graduate, four years from now, and get a full-time job so I can support myself for the rest of my life.

NANCY: Don't your parents ever send you money?

GLENDA: No.

NANCY: But you get along OK with your parents. Your mom writes to you.

GLENDA: What does that have to do with it? They *can't* send money. That's the difference between being temporarily broke, like you, and being poor, like me. There isn't any check in the mail. There never will be.

NANCY: Your parents can't send you anything?

GLENDA: Look. Have you ever found a notice on your door in the middle of winter that says your electricity is going to be shut off if you don't pay the bill within twenty-four hours?

NANCY: Well, no, but . . .

GLENDA: That happens to my family at least once every winter. No electricity means no heat, no hot water, and no lights. And it makes the landlord angry.

NANCY: You pay the bill, don't you? Before the power is shut off?

GLENDA: Not always. You can't pay a bill if you don't have any money.

NANCY: You mean your parents just let the electric company turn off the power?

GLENDA: They don't "let" them. They have no choice.

NANCY: Why don't they borrow the money?

GLENDA: From whom? When you're poor, you don't have any credit. My father can't go to a bank and ask for a loan. They'd laugh him right out the door. Banks only loan money to people who already have money.

NANCY: You could borrow from a friend or a relative.

GLENDA: Our friends and relatives don't have an extra hundred dollars lying around to pay our electric bill. They're all trying to scrape together enough to pay their own.

NANCY: How long were you without electricity?

GLENDA: Usually only a few days. Once it was three weeks. I thought I'd never be warm again. We slept all in one bed, my parents and my sister and brother and me. It was the only way to keep warm enough at night.

NANCY: *(Softly)* That's terrible.

GLENDA: The trouble is, once they shut off the power, there's an extra service charge to hook it back up again.

NANCY: How did you cook?

GLENDA: We ate canned beans.

NANCY: Cold?

GLENDA: Beans are good cold. Nothing wrong with cold beans. When you eat them straight from the can, there aren't any dishes to wash, which is a good thing when there's no hot water.

NANCY: *(Finishes packing. Closes suitcase.)* You're right. I don't know what it's like. Here I am, babbling on about real whipped cream and you . . .

GLENDA: We usually had bread and peanut butter, too, from the food bank. It wasn't so bad. We were poor, but we were never destitute. We always had a place to sleep; we managed to pay the rent. And I never had to go on a diet.

NANCY: I'm sorry I was so flippant about being broke.

GLENDA: That's OK.

NANCY: Look. I tell you what. Tell me how much you'll earn for those two days and I'll *give* it to you. No strings attached. I've got money set aside for Christmas shopping; I'll use that.

GLENDA: Why would you want to give me that much money?

NANCY: Because I want you to come home with me for Thanksgiving. I won't have any fun if I know you're here alone, eating Dorm Glop and working at Jacobson's.

GLENDA: I like Dorm Glop. I like working at Jacobson's.

NANCY: Nobody likes Dorm Glop.

GLENDA: I do. I like it because I know that three times every day it's going to be there. I don't care if it's Macaroni Surprise again.

NANCY: It will be. It always is on Thursday.

GLENDA: It doesn't matter. What matters is not worrying if there will be food on the table or not. The same with Jacobson's. I don't care if I have to stand for eight hours and wait on crabby customers. I don't care if I have to work when most people get a holiday. All I care is that I'm earning my pay. As long as I show up at Jacobson's, I will get my check at the end of the week. You said when your allowance check came, you almost cried from relief.

NANCY: That's right.

GLENDA: Well, let me tell you, when payday comes and I hold that piece of paper in my hands, I practically cry with joy. I want to shout, "Hallelujah!" because that money is mine. I earned it, and no one can take it away from me. It makes me proud. It makes me feel capable and independent and strong, and I wouldn't trade that feeling for a million turkey dinners.

NANCY: You know something? I envy you.

GLENDA: That just proves you're even crazier than I thought.

NANCY: When I get back from Thanksgiving vacation, I'm going to look for a part-time job. I'll tell Mom and Dad that I don't need an allowance anymore. It's time I earned my own spending money.

GLENDA: You might have to eat Macaroni Surprise on Thursdays, instead of sending out for pizza like you usually do.

NANCY: *(With sudden realization)* ***That's*** why you always eat Dorm Glop and never send out for pizza. Dorm Glop's free.

GLENDA: It isn't free. It's paid for. There's a difference.

NANCY: I thought maybe you didn't like pizza.

GLENDA: I love pizza. I don't like running out of money.

NANCY: Dorm Glop doesn't cost extra. Pizza does.

GLENDA: You're catching on.

NANCY: Do you think you could ask Mrs. Jacobson if she plans to do any hiring?

GLENDA: *(Nods her head, up and down. She speaks slowly and distinctly.)* Yes. I can do that.

NANCY: Thanks. *(Picks up suitcase, coat, purse.)* Happy Thanksgiving, Glenda.

GLENDA: Bring back some of those chocolate mints.

23

WHOSE SIDE IS GOD ON?

CAST: BILL and JEFF.

AT RISE: JEFF sits dejectedly on chair, head in hands. BILL enters.

BILL: What's wrong? Are you sick?

JEFF: I had an argument with Coach Nickels. At the end of basketball practice, he told all of us to pray for a win against Lincoln tonight.

BILL: Sounds like good advice. Lincoln's undefeated, you know. You guys are going to need all the help you can get.

JEFF: Including divine intervention? Why should God care who wins this basketball game?

BILL: Maybe it's just a figure of speech, like "keep your fingers crossed." Coach Nickels wouldn't really expect you to go around all day with your fingers crossed, and maybe he doesn't mean you should actually pray for a win, either.

JEFF: He wants us to pray for a win. I hung around until everyone else was gone and then I asked him. I said I'd be willing to pray that we played to the best of our ability, but I couldn't pray for a win.

BILL: What did he say?

JEFF: He said I could do whatever I want, but he was praying for a win. I said, "What if everyone on the Lincoln squad also prays to win?"

BILL: What are you trying to do, get bumped out of starting tonight?

JEFF: It just bugs me that people try to use God as a means to their own selfish ends.

BILL: It wouldn't be selfish if our team wins tonight. You'd make lots of fans very happy, including me.

JEFF: And lots of Lincoln fans very sad.

BILL: I tell you what. I'll pray for you. That way, you can follow your conscience and we'll still have God on our side.

JEFF: That's just the point. Why should God be on our side,

rather than Lincoln's?

BILL: Take it easy. I was only kidding. What got you started on this, anyway? Just wanted to get in bad with the coach?

JEFF: I saw an interview on the news last night. It was in a hospital room, and the journalist interviewed the only survivor of a plane crash. It was a small plane with six passengers, and it crashed on the side of a mountain during a thunderstorm. The guy was lucky he got rescued. He had a broken leg, so he had to wait for someone to find him. But he said something in that interview that really bothered me. He said, "God was watching out for me. Otherwise, I'd be dead."

BILL: What's wrong with that? It sounds like it was true.

JEFF: Didn't God care about the other people on the plane? Five passengers and the pilot were killed in the crash. If God was watching out for number six, why didn't he also watch out for the rest of them?

BILL: Maybe number six is a genius. Maybe he's going to invent the cure for AIDS.

JEFF: How do you suppose the families of those other people felt if they heard that newscast? What if your parents were killed in a plane crash, and the next day on TV you heard the sole survivor say that he was alive because God was watching out for him?

BILL: Are you an atheist or something?

JEFF: Do I have to be a genius in order to have God care about me?

BILL: Maybe he meant God helped him after the crash, when it was too late for the others.

JEFF: I have a hard time with that. If God would help one person, I think he would help everyone. It's just like the touchdown prayers.

BILL: The what?

JEFF: Somebody runs the ball in for a touchdown and then he kneels down and bows his head and says a prayer, thanking God for helping him score a touchdown. Haven't you seen them do that on TV?

BILL: Yeah, I guess I have.

JEFF: Why would God care who wins a football game?

BILL: Maybe they aren't praying. Maybe they're just out of breath.

JEFF: You don't cross yourself when you're out of breath.

BILL: What's with all this philosophy all of a sudden? Why do you care what some guy you never met says on TV?

JEFF: You're right. I guess I'm just nervous. Between the game tonight and our big history test, my nerves are shot.

BILL: Is the history test today? *(Glances at watch)* In less than two minutes?

JEFF: Didn't you study?

BILL: I forgot all about it. *(Closes eyes, folds hands, looks up.)* Oh, please, help me know the answers. *(Opens eyes. JEFF is shaking head in disgust.)* What's the matter?

JEFF: I did study. For three hours last night. So why should God hand you the answers?

BILL: Because I'm a good guy. *(BILL exits, with JEFF following.)*

JEFF: Maybe I don't understand how God works.

24

I KNOW I FLUNKED THE HISTORY TEST

CAST: Two players, KAREN and HEIDI.

SETTING: Hallway of school.

AT RISE: KAREN and HEIDI enter. Each carries a file folder.

KAREN: I can't look. It's too painful.

HEIDI: Well, I'm looking. *(She opens her folder and lets out a whoop of delight.)* I got an A! That means I'll get an A in history for the semester.

KAREN: *(Glumly)* Congratulations.

HEIDI: I hoped I might. I really studied for this one.

KAREN: I'll probably be grounded for the rest of the month.

HEIDI: Why? What did you do?

KAREN: I failed the final history test.

HEIDI: How do you know? You haven't looked yet.

KAREN: There's an F inside this folder. A big, red F.

HEIDI: But you studied, too, didn't you?

KAREN: What good would it do to study? I never get good grades in history. There's something wrong with my memory.

HEIDI: Even if you didn't study for the test, I doubt if you failed it. You came to class every day. You must remember something.

KAREN: I think my memory problem comes from eating too much turkey. There's some kind of an enzyme in turkey that makes you stupid.

HEIDI: Where in the world did you hear that?

KAREN: Did you ever hear of a smart turkey? They're the most stupid creatures you can imagine.

HEIDI: The Pilgrims ate a lot of turkey, and they were smart enough to find America.

KAREN: They ate the turkey after they got here.

HEIDI: Forget about the turkey and look at your grade.

KAREN: I never took such a hard test. All those questions about the Civil War. Who cares where battles were fought so long ago?

HEIDI: I think it would be interesting to visit that part of the country sometime. I'd like to see Gettysburg.

KAREN: When my folks find out I flunked the semester history test, I'll be lucky if I only get grounded. They'll probably disown me.

HEIDI: Your parents are not likely to disown their only daughter.

KAREN: Their only stupid daughter.

HEIDI: And you are not likely to get an F on the test. You've never had an F on any other test, have you?

KAREN: There's a first time for everything. Besides, Mr. Williams hates me.

HEIDI: Why do you think that?

KAREN: He just does. I can tell by the way he squints at me.

HEIDI: Mr. Williams squints at everyone. I think he needs glasses.

KAREN: It's different when he squints at me. At you, he squints benevolently. At me, he squints maliciously.

HEIDI: You are imagining things. Mr. Williams has no reason to hate you.

KAREN: Yes, he does. He hates me because I flunked the semester test.

HEIDI: Let's look at your test results. Then you can worry about whether Mr. Williams hates you. *(She reaches for KAREN's folder. KAREN jerks it away.)*

KAREN: Of course he hates me. I am a loser. Everybody hates losers.

HEIDI: You are not a loser.

KAREN: If I were a worm, all the early robins would find me.

HEIDI: Oh, good grief.

KAREN: If I were a duck, I'd be the first one in the air on opening day of hunting season. *(HEIDI gives her a disgusted look, but says nothing.)* If I were a rabbit, someone would cut off my foot, to bring good luck.

HEIDI: Oh, gross. What is the matter with you?

KAREN: Nothing's the matter with me. I am simply stating facts.

HEIDI: Well, if there was an award for negative attitude, you would win it.

KAREN: There! You see? Even my best friend agrees that I'm a loser.

HEIDI: Stop that. Haven't you ever heard of self-fulfilling prophecy?

KAREN: If I have, I've forgotten.

HEIDI: If you believe something is going to happen, you increase the chance that it will. When you think of yourself as a loser, then you do things to create your own bad luck.

KAREN: Like flunking the most important history test of the year.

HEIDI: You didn't expect to flunk when you took the test.

KAREN: Yes, I did.

HEIDI: If you really expected to flunk, you would not have bothered to take it.

KAREN: I didn't know when I showed up for the test that it would be so hard. Once I saw it, I expected to flunk.

HEIDI: Would you please open your folder and find out what your grade is? *(KAREN clutches folder to her chest and shakes her head.)* Do you want me to look for you?

KAREN: I don't need to look. I already know what my grade is.

HEIDI: How could you? Mr. Williams just handed these to us three minutes ago.

KAREN: *(Emphatically)* I know what my grade is.

HEIDI: Really? *(KAREN nods yes.)* Are you telling me that you really did get an F? You aren't just worrying?

KAREN: You know the old saying that history repeats itself? Well, in my case, I'll be repeating history.

HEIDI: Oh. I'm sorry. Did Mr. Williams call your parents?

KAREN: No.

HEIDI: Then how did you find out?

KAREN: He didn't need to call. I knew the minute I got to the questions about the Civil War that I was doomed.

HEIDI: *(Losing patience)* Have you seen your grade or haven't you?

KAREN: I don't need to see it. I told you, I already . . . *(HEIDI suddenly grabs KAREN's test out of her hands.)* Hey! Give me that. *(HEIDI quickly opens folder and looks inside.)*

HEIDI: You got a C-plus.

KAREN: What? No way.

HEIDI: See for yourself. *(She holds the open folder under KAREN's nose.)* A big, red C and a big, red plus.

KAREN: Mr. Williams must have made a mistake. I think he needs glasses.

HEIDI: There's a note, too. It says, "If you would study for these tests, you could probably get an A."

KAREN: I knew it. He got my folder mixed up with someone else's.

HEIDI: All that worrying for nothing. Come on. We don't want to be late to geometry.

KAREN: It doesn't matter if I'm late or not. I'm flunking geometry anyway. *(HEIDI rolls eyes in disgust. They exit.)*

RIDING THE BIG BANANA

CAST: Two players, GARY and BRENT.

(BRENT is on scene at opening. GARY enters.)

GARY: Happy birthday!

BRENT: Thanks.

GARY: Sixteen, at last. *(He moves his hands as if steering a car.)* **Driver's license, here he comes. Are you taking your driver's test today?**

BRENT: No.

GARY: Why not? I got my license the minute I was old enough.

BRENT: It won't do me any good.

GARY: What do you mean?

BRENT: I can't have a car until I'm out of high school.

GARY: How are you going to get to school?

BRENT: My parents say there is nothing wrong with riding the school bus.

GARY: Are you kidding? They want you to keep riding The Big Banana after you're old enough to drive?

BRENT: I told them all my friends have cars, but my parents were born in the Stone Age. They think an automobile is a luxury, not a necessity.

GARY: Get a job and buy your own car. That's what I'm doing. I make just barely enough at Burger Boy to pay for the car payments and insurance, but I never have to ask my folks if I can use the car.

BRENT: They won't let me do that, either. They think a job will interfere with my studies, and they like me to do extracurricular stuff.

GARY: Man, your parents really are prehistoric, aren't they?

BRENT: Most of the time, they're OK. They just don't understand how everyone makes fun of The Big Banana. I'll probably be the only senior next year who's still riding the school bus. Me and all the freshmen.

GARY: What about your grandparents? Couldn't you wheedle them into giving you a car for your birthday? If your grandparents bought you a car, your parents couldn't make them take it back.

BRENT: My grandparents are worse than Mom and Dad. They say cars are the biggest air polluters of all. They think it's a disgrace that kids who could ride the school bus choose to drive instead.

GARY: That's because they never had to ride The Big Banana. They don't know how embarrassing it is to line up at the bus stop like kindergartners. And when it's raining, there's no place dry to wait for the bus. Tell them it's a hardship. Tell them you need a car so you won't get pneumonia.

BRENT: When they were my age, they walked four miles to school. I've heard all about it a hundred times. They say there was no need for fitness clubs when they were young because everyone walked a lot.

GARY: No thanks. Why should I spend an hour walking four miles when I can drive there in five minutes?

BRENT: It isn't so bad. I walk home quite often. When I stay at school for volleyball practice or something, I'm too late to ride The Big Banana so I walk home.

GARY: Can't you get a ride?

BRENT: When it's raining, I call my mom and have her pick me up on her way home from work; but if it's nice weather, I kind of like the walk. It gives me a chance to think.

GARY: I can think when I'm behind the wheel. I'd cut off my arm before I'd give up my car. I mean, that car is part of me. It's who I am.

BRENT: You're lucky.

GARY: I better get going, or I'll be late to work. Want to ride over to Burger Boy with me and have some fries?

BRENT: I can't. I have volleyball practice. We have a great team this year. It's really too bad you couldn't fix your schedule at work so you could play.

GARY: Come on down after practice. I could take my break and sit with you for awhile.

BRENT: I have to go home and bake cookies. The History Club is having a potluck supper to plan a fundraiser to get money for our trip. I'm supposed to bring cookies.

GARY: I heard about that trip. Are you guys really going to go to Washington, D.C., during spring break?

BRENT: Yes. It's going to be great. We'll see the Lincoln Memorial and the Capitol and all the other things we've been learning about. I can hardly wait.

GARY: *(Wistfully)* I've never been to Washington, D.C.

BRENT: Of course, we'll have to have about a dozen car washes and bake sales and other events to earn the money. But those things are fun, too. We might even sponsor a dance-a-thon at one of the Friday night dances.

GARY: I always have to work on Friday nights. Friday and Saturday are the busy days at Burger Boy.

BRENT: But it's worth it, isn't it? I'd rather have my own car than go to the Friday night dances at school.

GARY: At least I never have to set foot in the dreaded Big Banana.

BRENT: You probably wouldn't like the trip to Washington, D.C. We're going to take a bus tour one day.

GARY: Forget it. No bus tours for me. But if I have any money left after I fix my carburetor, I'll come to one of your car washes.

BRENT: Hey, that would be great.

GARY: See you later. My mean machine is waiting for me.

BRENT: *(Looks around.)* Where?

GARY: I had to park a couple of blocks down the street today. I got here too late to get a space in the parking lot. *(He exits.)*

BRENT: Lucky dog. My family doesn't realize how much I'm missing.

26

PRACTICALLY TWINS

CAST: Two players, ELEANOR and NATASHA.

(No setting necessary. Both players are On Stage at start.)

ELEANOR: This is my friend, Natasha.

NATASHA: Who am I, really?

ELEANOR: Natasha is a gymnast. She does the uneven parallel bars.

NATASHA: I enjoy gymnastics, but it is not enough to say I am a gymnast. That is such a small part of me.

ELEANOR: She gets first place in practically every gymnastics meet. Our coach thinks she has Olympics potential.

NATASHA: My friend, Eleanor, likes to tell people that my coach thinks I have the potential to make the U.S. Olympic squad someday. I wish she wouldn't always say that. I want her to like me for who I am, not for how I perform on the bars.

ELEANOR: Natasha and I have been friends since third grade. We live just two doors apart.

NATASHA: Third grade. When I was in third grade I was not plagued by so many unanswered questions. In the third grade, I knew who I was and I knew what I wanted to do with my life. I wanted to be a mail carrier. I loved to get mail. I hardly ever got any, so when I did, it was a major event. I thought it would be wonderful to be a mail carrier and bring excitement and joy to the people on my route. Later, when I learned that mail carriers bring bills and advertisements, I lost my enthusiasm. The trouble is, I have not replaced that enthusiasm with a new goal. What do I want to be? What can I do with my life?

ELEANOR: Imagine being good enough to make the Olympics!

NATASHA: Sometimes I get so tired of practicing my routines. People don't realize how many hours of hard

work it takes to be good at a sport. And you have to do it every day. No exceptions. But whenever I think of quitting, I can't. If I quit, I'd never know whether I would have made it or not.

ELEANOR: Natasha's parents are both doctors. No wonder she's so smart. No wonder she never gets sick. I'm always getting a cold or the chicken pox or a touch of the flu, but Natasha is strong as an elephant.

NATASHA: People are too impressed with doctors. The minute anyone finds out that my parents are doctors they make three assumptions: 1. We are rich; 2. My parents are brilliant; 3. I will be a doctor someday, too.

ELEANOR: I suppose Natasha will go to medical school eventually, but I hope she trains for the Olympics first.

NATASHA: I have no desire to be a doctor. For most families, dinner table conversation is about sports or current events or what happened in school. My family discusses the complications of gallbladder surgery or so-and-so's white blood count or patient X's liver disease. It isn't very appetizing, let me tell you.

ELEANOR: Except for her parents being doctors and her being so good at gymnastics, Natasha and I are pretty much the same. We even go to the same church.

NATASHA: Eleanor likes church; she believes what they say. I question everything. My parents say I have to go until I'm sixteen because they want me to have some kind of religious background. They say I can decide for myself then.

ELEANOR: I feel so blessed to have a friend like Natasha. I hope that we'll always be this close.

NATASHA: When I'm sixteen, I'll quit going. Or I'll try other churches.

ELEANOR: We go to the same school and have the same friends. We're practically twins.

NATASHA: Eleanor has a whole circle of friends. I'm included in all their activities, but they aren't really my friends. They are acquaintances. I like all the kids in our group, but I never think the way they do. I always feel different, like I don't quite fit in.

ELEANOR: If Natasha ever moved away, I think I'd die of loneliness. I tell her everything—and she tells me everything, too. The amazing thing is, we always agree. We think exactly alike.

NATASHA: It's lonely to feel different. Eleanor's lucky. She'll go through life happy, doing what's expected of her, never challenging the rules. It must feel comfortable to just accept things as they are and never hunger for more.

ELEANOR: Natasha's lucky. It must be wonderful to be smart and talented. I'm ordinary; my life is predictable. I'll probably get a clerical job after high school and get married a couple of years later and raise a family. Not that there's anything wrong with any of that, but it means I may live my whole life right here, within shouting distance of where I started kindergarten.

NATASHA: When I think of all the options, it's scary. I want to see other countries, learn other languages, experience other thinking. I want to stretch my mind.

ELEANOR: There won't ever be any extraordinary excitement in my life. My thrills will have to come vicariously, through knowing people like Natasha.

NATASHA: Life was easier when all I wanted was to deliver the mail.

ELEANOR: I wish I could be on an Olympic team.

27

A NORMAL FATHER-SON CONVERSATION

CAST: Two male players, DAD and SON.

SETTING: Scene is interior of home. This can be sketchy; the only necessary props are a small TV and a telephone.

AT RISE: DAD is seated, intently watching a baseball game on TV. *(Back of TV is toward audience.)* SON enters.

SON: Can I talk to you, Dad?

DAD: Just a minute. The Giants have the bases loaded.

SON: It's important.

DAD: *(Sighs. Clicks off TV.)* **What is it that's so important it can't wait until the end of the inning?**

SON: Nothing. Go ahead and watch the ball game. A baseball game is more important than your son.

DAD: I turned it off, didn't I?

SON: Only because I insisted.

DAD: Do you want to tell me something or not?

SON: Forget it.

DAD: I turned off the Giants in the bottom of the ninth with the bases loaded and the score tied at one-all, just so you could tell me to forget it? What's the matter with you?

SON: Nothing's the matter with me. Nothing that a normal father-son conversation couldn't fix.

DAD: I am normal. I am ready to converse.

SON: It isn't the same when I have to beg for your attention. If you don't want to talk to me of your own free will, then it isn't any good.

DAD: You were the one who wanted to talk.

SON: I was. I am.

DAD: So, talk.

SON: Uh, how's work, Dad?

DAD: What?

SON: Work. You know, that office you go to for ten hours every Monday through Friday. How's everything there?

DAD: OK. No problems. Work is OK. *(Slight pause)* How's school?

SON: OK. No problems there, either. School's OK.

DAD: Good. Well, now that we have that out of the way, is it all right if I see how the game turned out? *(He reaches toward TV.)*

SON: *(Blurts this, quickly.)* When you met Mom, how did you know she was the right girl for you?

DAD: *(Sits back, without touching knob.)* I didn't. I took a chance.

SON: It wasn't love at first sight?

DAD: Do you think you're in love? Is that what this is all about?

SON: Me? Are you kidding? Who would I be in love with?

DAD: I don't know. Lisa Ellensworth, maybe?

SON: Lisa? No way.

DAD: She's cute.

SON: Do you think so?

DAD: Don't you?

SON: Well, sure, but I didn't think anyone else had noticed.

DAD: When a girl looks the way Lisa looks, people notice.

SON: I suppose so.

DAD: Have you asked her to go out with you?

SON: She'd never go out with me.

DAD: Why not? There's nothing wrong with you. You come from a good family.

SON: She's a brain.

DAD: You're no idiot.

SON: I don't know how to ask a girl to go out.

DAD: Call her on the telephone.

SON: I don't know what to say.

DAD: When she answers, say, "Lisa, this is Mark. Would you like to go to a movie with me next Saturday?"

SON: What if she says no?

DAD: Then you say, "How about some other time?"

SON: What if she's saying no because she would never go out with me under any circumstances?

DAD: You'll be able to tell if she's saying no because she can't go that night or no because she wouldn't go out with you for a million dollars.

SON: How? How can I tell?

DAD: You'll just know it. Trust me.

SON: Maybe I'll wait until tomorrow and ask her in person.

DAD: It's easier on the phone. Especially if she says no.

SON: You think she's going to say no, don't you? You're right. Why would a gorgeous, smart girl like Lisa want to go out with me?

DAD: Because you're a handsome, smart boy. What's her number?

SON: 747-0382.

DAD: *(He picks up telephone and hands it to SON.)* Dial it. Right now, before you get cold feet.

SON: I already have cold feet.

DAD: If you don't call her, ten minutes from now you'll wish you had.

SON: You're right. I'll do it. *(He punches the numbers quickly, filled with determination.)*

DAD: Good. And I'm going to watch the end of the ball game. *(He turns TV on.)*

SON: Hello, Lisa? This is Mark. Would you like to go to the movie with me on Saturday? You would? Are you sure? I mean, that's great. I'll see you at school tomorrow, and we can decide what time. Yes. 'Bye. *(DAD leans closer to TV, trying to hear. He looks excited and shakes one fist in the air.)*

SON: She said yes.

DAD: Good.

SON: I can't believe it. Lisa Ellensworth is going out with me Saturday night.

DAD: Look at this. It's the top of the eleventh, and the Giants have runners on first and second with no outs.

SON: The biggest event of my life has just transpired. How can you care about a baseball game?

DAD: Oh, no. Not a double play. Rats!

SON: *(Shouts.)* Dad!

DAD: *(Looks away from TV, at SON.)* What? What is it?

SON: Thanks, Dad.

DAD: You're welcome. *(SON just stands there, grinning.)* Would you like to watch the ball game with me?

SON: No. I have to get ready.

DAD: For what?

SON: For my date with Lisa.

DAD: I thought you were going on Saturday.

SON: I am. We are.

DAD: Well, if you need to get ready, don't let me keep you.

SON: *(Exiting)* I can't believe she said yes. Lisa said yes.

DAD: A strike? He called that a strike! That ball was inside by a mile.

28

PROM NIGHT PARTY

CAST: Two female players, KELLY and JOAN.

SETTING: Optional.

KELLY: Are you nervous about Saturday night?

JOAN: No. I'm excited, but I'm not nervous.

KELLY: Well, I'm scared to death.

JOAN: Why? You've gone out with Tim lots of times.

KELLY: Not to the prom.

JOAN: The prom won't be that much different than other dates, except we'll be more dressed up and we'll get home later.

KELLY: If you and Glen weren't double-dating with Tim and me, I'd probably chicken out.

JOAN: That's the silliest thing I ever heard. You sound like you're afraid to go to your own high school prom.

KELLY: It isn't the prom part that scares me. It's—you know. Afterwards.

JOAN: The party? You've been to a hundred parties.

KELLY: Not in a hotel suite. Not where the guys rent extra rooms to use privately.

JOAN: What are you talking about? What extra rooms?

KELLY: You don't know about the rooms?

JOAN: No.

KELLY: They do it every year. The guys rent a couple of extra rooms and then one couple at a time leaves the party and goes off by themselves to—well, you know. Every couple takes a turn, and when they come back, everyone else cheers.

JOAN: Are you saying that every couple who attends the party at The Cheshire Suites is planning to—to use one of those rooms? *(KELLY nods yes.)* **You and Tim?** *(KELLY nods yes again.)* **You're planning to—to have sex that night?**

KELLY: That's what I'm nervous about.

JOAN: Oh. Do you think Glen is expecting *me* to—to use one of those rooms with him?

KELLY: Sure. Everyone does it. Every year, during the after-prom party, everyone . . .

JOAN: I don't believe you. My sister went to the prom last year and she didn't. At least, I don't think she did. She never said anything about it.

KELLY: I doubt she would have come home and made a family announcement.

JOAN: Well, I'm not doing it. Not prom night. Not with Glen.

KELLY: I thought you liked Glen.

JOAN: I do like him. But we've only gone out one other time. I barely know him.

KELLY: You were so excited when he asked you to go with him.

JOAN: I thought he was only asking me to go to the prom. I didn't know he was inviting me to go to bed, too.

KELLY: What are you going to do?

JOAN: What do you mean?

KELLY: Are you going to tell Glen ahead of time?

JOAN: You want me to tell him that I have no intention of having sex with him, when the subject has never come up?

KELLY: You can't wait until prom night and then tell him no.

JOAN: He might be relieved. Maybe Glen doesn't want to use one of those private rooms any more than I do.

KELLY: Ha! *All* the guys want to. Tim can hardly wait.

JOAN: He said that? You've discussed this?

KELLY: The subject has come up. What's wrong with that?

JOAN: It seems so—so calculated. Like making an appointment. "Let me check my calendar. Yes, I'm available on Saturday at two a.m. to lose my virginity. I'll write it down."

KELLY: That isn't funny.

JOAN: Are you sure you want to keep that appointment?

KELLY: There has to be a first time.

JOAN: You didn't answer my question.

KELLY: No. I'm not sure. But Tim is sure, and he thinks I am, too. We've joked about it. He showed me the condoms he bought. We've come close a couple of times before.

JOAN: Don't let Tim decide what you want. You can always stick with me that night. I'm not leaving the group.

KELLY: What if Glen gets mad and takes you home early?

JOAN: Then I'll know he's not the kind of person I want to go out with again. But I don't think he'd be angry if I refuse to go to bed with him on our second date.

KELLY: Tim would get mad.

JOAN: Maybe not. He might be disappointed, especially if you've talked about it and let him think you feel the same way he does about it. I think *you're* the one who should say something ahead of time.

KELLY: Are you kidding? And take a chance of breaking up, two days before the prom?

JOAN: If Tim would break up with you over this, he isn't someone you want to be so serious with.

KELLY: I'm not missing out on my senior prom.

JOAN: Maybe you're wrong when you say everyone uses those rooms. How do you know that?

KELLY: Tim told me.

JOAN: Are you sure he isn't stretching the truth a little? Maybe one group of kids did that; it doesn't mean everyone did. And it certainly doesn't mean you have to.

KELLY: I can't accuse Tim of lying to me.

JOAN: Do you want Tim to be honest with you about his feelings?

KELLY: Well, sure.

JOAN: Then be honest with him.

KELLY: That's easy for you to say.

JOAN: How would you feel if Tim told you he doesn't want to go to the hotel party after the prom?

KELLY: Ecstatic.

JOAN: Now you're scared to death. If Tim said no, you'd be ecstatic. That ought to tell you something.

KELLY: When I was in junior high, I thought the senior prom would be a carefree, wonderful, fun night. How did it get so complicated?

JOAN: I plan to have a carefree, wonderful, fun time on Saturday. Without a private room.

I'LL BE THERE

CAST: Two male players, KEN and SAM.

(No special setting required. KEN and SAM are On Stage at start.)

KEN: Are you going to go to the school play tonight?

SAM: No. There's good TV on. It's part three of a show that I saw the first two parts of.

KEN: Can't you tape it and watch it later?

SAM: I suppose I could, but I'm tired and I'll have to rush like crazy to get to the play on time. It just doesn't sound like much fun.

KEN: Ginny and Ron will be disappointed if you don't go. They're hoping for a sell-out.

SAM: I know.

KEN: Once you get there, you'll like it. And you can sleep late tomorrow, can't you?

SAM: No. It's my aunt and uncle's wedding anniversary, and we have to go to a family reunion. My parents want to leave early to have time to visit with all the relatives. I tried to talk them into letting me stay home, but they wouldn't buy it. They said when people want to celebrate the fact that they have been married for twenty-five years, the least their relatives can do is be there to celebrate with them. Or, as my mom put it, "I'd rather spend a day this way than to listen to them crying over a divorce." But I still wish I didn't have to go.

KEN: Maybe you can sleep in the car.

SAM: Maybe.

KEN: I'm going to try to get there early tonight, so I can sit down in front. If you decide to come, I could save you a seat.

SAM: No, thanks. I'm going to skip the play.

KEN: Remember when I had that violin solo in the winter concert and I was so nervous and excited?

SAM: I heard you did great. I was sorry I couldn't get there to hear it.

KEN: I was sorry, too. Ginny and Ron came. Neither of them love orchestra music, but they came because they're my friends. When there was an event that was important to me, they showed up. They went to my baseball game, too, the first time I was the starting pitcher. They cheered so loud it was embarrassing, but it helped me relax and I pitched a good game.

SAM: I can see why you feel obligated to go to the play.

KEN: I'm not sure obligated is the right word. It will be fun to go to the play. It seems to me that when you care about someone, then you show up for the important events in their life.

SAM: There'll be tons of people at the play tonight. It won't matter if I go or not. They probably won't even miss me.

KEN: They may not miss you, but if you go and then stay around afterwards to tell them what you liked about it, I guarantee they'll notice. They'll appreciate it.

SAM: Friends understand if you don't want to do something. Ginny and Ron would say just because they wanted to be in a play doesn't mean that everyone they know has to come to see it.

KEN: They go to all your football games.

SAM: That's different. Everybody goes to the football games. Well, I better get going. Tell Ginny and Ron I'm sorry I couldn't make it to their play.

KEN: Are you?

SAM: What's that supposed to mean?

KEN: You want me to lie and tell them you're sorry you can't come when the truth is, you could go if you wanted to.

SAM: I don't see why you're making such a big deal out of the school play. It isn't as if Ginny and Ron were opening on Broadway.

KEN: When you're flaked out in front of the TV tonight, will you do one thing for me?

SAM: What?

KEN: Think how you would like it if you had a birthday party and nobody came. Or it was the first football game of the season and all of the fans decided to stay home and watch television. Or you graduated and your whole family had other plans that day and didn't come to your graduation.

SAM: Forget it. None of that would ever happen. You're just trying to make me feel guilty because I'd rather stay home and watch my program than come back to school and watch the play. Well, I'm sorry, but the play just isn't that important to me.

KEN: The play isn't important to me, either.

SAM: Then why are you going?

KEN: Because Ginny and Ron are.

30

HUMAN BEANS

CAST: Two female players, MARY and PAULA.

AT RISE: PAULA is On Stage at start. MARY enters, walks toward PAULA as she speaks.

MARY: Are you ready for the great biology experiment?

PAULA: No.

MARY: Me either. Cutting up a dead frog is not exactly my idea of a good time.

PAULA: That's for sure.

MARY: Well, let's go get it over with.

PAULA: Go ahead. I'll see you later.

MARY: What about you?

PAULA: I'm not going.

MARY: Why not? Are you sick?

PAULA: No. I'm just not going to biology today.

MARY: You're cutting class?

PAULA: I'm going to go sit in the library.

MARY: You can't! This class is required. You'll get an incomplete for the semester.

PAULA: I know. I've decided to take the incomplete rather than dissect the frog.

MARY: It won't be that bad. My sister did it last year, and she said except for the smell it wasn't as awful as everyone says it is. If my sister can do it without getting sick, you'll be able to do it.

PAULA: I don't *want* to do it. I think it's wrong. Why should all those frogs be killed, just so we can cut them open? I am capable of learning about the inside of a frog in other ways. I don't need personal experience.

MARY: It's only a frog, Paula. It isn't like we were going to cut up somebody's pet poodle.

PAULA: Would it be wrong to kill a pet poodle and dissect it in class?

MARY: Are you kidding? Of course it would be wrong!

PAULA: Why is that any worse than killing the frogs?

MARY: It just is.

PAULA: I'm not sure the frogs would agree.

MARY: Do you think the frogs have rights? Is that it?

PAULA: The frogs have a right to live.

MARY: The frogs aren't living. They're already dead. They won't know they're being dissected.

PAULA: I'll know. If I go to class today, I'll be saying I think it was OK to kill all those frogs.

MARY: Geez, Paula. You make it sound like we were going to line the frogs up and strangle them. *(PAULA shrugs and says nothing.)* I'm not going to kill any frog. That part's already done.

PAULA: The frogs are dead, all the same.

MARY: This isn't murder, you know. It's a scientific experiment.

PAULA: There are other ways to learn. Better ways.

MARY: You sound like you care more about animals than people.

PAULA: I care about both.

MARY: If you get an incomplete in biology, you'll wreck your grade-point average. You might not be able to play volleyball next year.

PAULA: I know.

MARY: You're willing to give up volleyball because of a stupid frog?

PAULA: No. But I'm willing to give up volleyball in order to stand up for what I believe.

MARY: I think you're making a big mistake.

PAULA: I've thought about this a lot. I've decided that when you think something is wrong and you do it anyway, you have compromised. You're a lesser person from then on.

MARY: What about the rest of the volleyball team? Isn't it wrong to let them down? We have a good chance of winning the district tournament next year, if you're playing. Come on Paula. The frog isn't worth such a sacrifice.

PAULA: I think it is.

MARY: You might be giving up a sports scholarship. A pro career!

PAULA: Not likely.

MARY: A million-dollar contract!

PAULA: Don't forget the cereal commercials.

MARY: OK, OK. So maybe you won't make it as a professional volleyball player.

PAULA: I don't *want* to be a professional volleyball player.

MARY: Mr. Mackett will probably ask me where you are. What do you want me to tell him?

PAULA: He won't ask. He already knows I'm not coming. I went in yesterday after school and asked if I could do an alternate assignment, instead of taking the incomplete.

MARY: He said no?

PAULA: He said if he let me do an alternate assignment other kids would want to do one, too.

MARY: He's right about that. Given a choice, I'd take the alternate assignment. Most people would.

PAULA: Most people don't want to dissect a frog—and yet, everyone is going to do it anyway.

MARY: No one wants an incomplete in a major subject. You'll probably have to go to summer school to make it up.

PAULA: If everyone who takes biology refused to dissect a frog, what do you think would happen?

MARY: I don't know. Mr. Mackett can't give an incomplete to the entire tenth grade.

PAULA: If everybody cut class today and refused to participate, maybe next year's classes would not be required to dissect frogs.

MARY: And there would be no extracurricular sports at all. They're only frogs, They aren't human beings.

PAULA: When I was a little kid, my big brother used to tease me by calling me a human being. I thought he said human bean, b-e-a-n, and I pictured a long, skinny, green person. I used to cry and shout that I wasn't a bean. I was in third grade before I figured out that he was saying human being.

MARY: What does that have to do with biology class?

PAULA: A couple of years ago, a funny thing happened. I decided I don't want to be a human being *(enunciate clearly: being)* either.

MARY: You want to be a frog?

PAULA: Instead of a human being, I want to be a human doing. I don't want simply to be—to wait until something happens and then react to it. That's too passive. I want to take action.

MARY: Couldn't you take some action that would still let you play volleyball next year? You're the best spiker this school has had in a long time.

PAULA: Thanks.

MARY: People will say you're a wimp, that you're staying away because you're squeamish.

PAULA: I wrote an article for the school paper, explaining how I feel. It will be in the next issue.

MARY: Do your parents know you're doing this?

PAULA: Yes. They said it's my decision.

MARY: If I got an incomplete, my parents would have a fit. I'd be grounded for a month.

PAULA: I'm not asking you to cut class with me.

MARY: Then I guess I'll be going. *(She starts to leave, hesitates, turns back to PAULA.)* Are you *sure* you want to do this?

PAULA: I'm sure.

MARY: But you're the only one. It won't make any difference. Nothing will change. Next year's biology students will still be cutting up frogs.

PAULA: It will make a difference. It'll make a few people question whether I'm right or wrong. When they talk about me and about whether I'll get to play volleyball, they'll also think about compassion and cruelty. They'll wonder, maybe for the first time, whether it is right for humans to use other species as laboratory tools.

MARY: You know something? I think you're crazy, but I admire your guts for standing up for what you think.

PAULA: Thanks.

MARY: Well, here I go. Mr. Frog is waiting. *(She hurries almost to exit, then stops.)* Before I saw you, I was only worried about getting sick in class. Now I feel kind of sorry for the frog. *(She exits.)*

PAULA: And I feel sorry for the human beings who will dissect them. *(She exits, the opposite way from Mary.)*

31

THE UGLIEST HAIR IN THE WORLD

CAST: Two females, RUTH and CHAR.

SETTING: Optional.

RUTH: **Look at my hair. Have you ever seen such ugly hair? No, wait. Don't answer. I don't want to hear it.**

CHAR: **What's wrong with your hair?**

RUTH: **What's wrong with my hair? Are you serious?**

CHAR: **It looks OK to me.**

RUTH: **Run. Do not walk, run to your nearest eye doctor and make an appointment. You may be going blind.**

CHAR: **There's nothing wrong with my eyes, and there's nothing wrong with your hair, either.**

RUTH: **For your information, I have the ugliest hair in the world.**

CHAR: **That isn't true. I've seen lots uglier hair.**

RUTH: **Where? In the zoo?**

CHAR: **You can get a comb through your hair. Mine is like combing a bird's nest.**

RUTH: **Have you noticed how sexy the women in shampoo commercials are? They barely move and their silky, long hair swirls around their shoulders.**

CHAR: **They do it with off-camera fans. Your hair would swirl sexily, too, if a couple of high-powered fans were blowing air at you.**

RUTH: **My hair would not swirl sexily if I was caught in a hurricane.**

CHAR: **If you were caught in a hurricane, you wouldn't care what your hair did.**

RUTH: **I'm going to shave my head.**

CHAR: **Oh, great. Why don't you have your nose pierced while you're at it?**

RUTH: **If I shaved my head, I would never again have to worry about my hair.**

CHAR: You think being bald will make you sexy?

RUTH: I have tried every combination of shampoo, conditioners, and highlighters known to womankind and my hair remains exactly the same, dull shade of mouse.

CHAR: You're too hard on yourself. I like your hair. At least you have some natural curl. How would you like to be stuck with my hair—straight as a yardstick and just about as exciting?

RUTH: I would trade hair with you any day. Yours is thick and shiny. Mine is so thin I could probably shave it off with one stroke of the razor.

CHAR: Well, don't try. I guarantee that if you shave your head, you will regret it. Do you have any idea of how people would stare?

RUTH: At least they'd notice me. I'd rather be stared at than ignored.

CHAR: Maybe you should get a perm. Your hair might have more body if it was permed.

RUTH: I got a perm two weeks ago.

CHAR: Oh. I hadn't noticed.

RUTH: Nobody noticed. That's my point exactly. Since my hair is the same as invisible, why don't I just get rid of it?

CHAR: I'm sorry I didn't notice your perm. It doesn't seem any curlier. Are you sure they left the solution on long enough?

RUTH: It was plenty curly the first day. It was so frizzed I had it straightened.

CHAR: No wonder I didn't notice. You undid it before I saw you.

RUTH: It cost me a total of sixty-five dollars, and I ended up looking exactly the way I started.

CHAR: I was thinking of getting a perm, but you've changed my mind.

RUTH: Why would you want a perm?

CHAR: Because I hate my hair the way it is.

RUTH: You are insane. Why would you hate your hair? Your hair is gorgeous.

CHAR: All the ends are split. I look like I should be riding a broom.

RUTH: There must be something wrong with your mirror. You are not describing the person I am talking to.

CHAR: It's also too long.

RUTH: So try wearing it short. Maybe you'd like it better short.

CHAR: I used to wear it short. It took me three years to grow it out to this length, and now I hate it.

RUTH: If you hate it long, why don't you get it cut?

CHAR: I hated it short, too. When it was short, I always thought if I could only wait until my hair grew out, I would love it. Instead, I have the ugliest hair in the world.

RUTH: I already said that. *I* have the ugliest hair in the world.

CHAR: Then I have the ugliest hair in the universe.

RUTH: We could both dye our hair. Maybe if we were redheads, we would be happy.

CHAR: I doubt it. I don't really want red hair.

RUTH: Neither do I.

CHAR: Let's forget about our hair. We're stuck with it, so let's just forget it.

RUTH: Good plan. I will not mention my hair again.

CHAR: Neither will I.

RUTH: Now if I could only do something about my nose.

CHAR: *Your* nose? Don't you mean *my* nose?

32

PAST INJUSTICES

CAST: Two brothers, HARRY and MIKE.
(Scene can be anything: Two chairs or a complete room or simply a bare stage. HARRY and MIKE are On Stage at start.)

HARRY: My friend Ronnie got a cat today. A little black kitten.

MIKE: That's nice.

HARRY: His parents didn't know he was going to get it, but they let him keep it anyway.

MIKE: Now don't start in about that.

HARRY: His sister got it for him. Somebody had a box of free kittens outside the grocery store, and Ronnie's sister took one. Without asking her parents. Do you know what they said when they found out?

MIKE: Look. The cat business was ten years ago. Forget it.

HARRY: They said, "It's OK with us if you want a cat."

MIKE: Good. That was very nice of them.

HARRY: I couldn't believe it. Ronnie's parents came home from work, and there were Ronnie and his sister on the floor, playing with a kitten, and all they said was that it was OK with them.

MIKE: Lucky Ronnie.

HARRY: Nobody yelled. Nobody had six fits. And nobody grabbed the innocent little kitten and took it off to death row.

MIKE: You don't know for sure that Felix died. Maybe he got adopted.

HARRY: And maybe I won the lottery.

MIKE: If you did, will you lend me ten dollars?

HARRY: I didn't win the lottery, dodo brain. And Felix didn't get adopted. He got a lethal injection in his furry little . . .

MIKE: Stop it! I don't want to hear this again.

HARRY: You don't want to face the fact that our parents deliberately took our kitten away from us and sentenced

it to death.

MIKE: Maybe. Maybe Felix died, and maybe he didn't.

HARRY: You saw the stats. More than seventy percent of the cats taken to the shelter were euthanized.

MIKE: And almost thirty percent were adopted.

HARRY: The point is, Mom and Dad took the chance. Even with odds like that, they left Felix at the shelter.

MIKE: Don't get so worked up. It was ten years ago. Felix would probably be dead by now anyway.

HARRY: So would Abraham Lincoln. Does that mean John Wilkes Booth did the right thing?

MIKE: Let's talk about something else.

HARRY: When I saw Ronnie with that cat, I wanted to cry. I felt like I was four years old again.

MIKE: Well, you aren't. You should forgive Mom and Dad for the Felix business and then forget about it.

HARRY: Forget about it? How can I forget something like that?

MIKE: For starters, we could quit talking about it.

HARRY: I cried myself to sleep every night for almost a year. What they did was a form of child abuse. I won't ever forget it. I'll never forgive them, either, and frankly, I don't understand how you can dismiss it so easily. Do you like to see little animals suffer?

MIKE: Felix didn't suffer. Even if he was euthanized, it was done humanely.

HARRY: Well, I suffered. I'm in pain every time I think about it.

MIKE: Then quit thinking about it. Let it go. You can't change the past, so why keep replaying it?

HARRY: Mom and Dad have never understood how I feel. Sometimes I think the hospital made a mistake and gave me to the wrong parents when I was born.

MIKE: I agree. My real brother would never keep whining about something that happened ten years ago.

HARRY: It isn't just Felix. It's everything. It's my whole life.

They don't understand anything about me. They have no idea who I am.

MIKE: They probably assume you are Harry Ryan Tupman, since that's what they named you.

HARRY: Inside. They don't understand what I care about, what's important to me. They don't know who I am inside.

MIKE: So, who are you?

HARRY: You don't understand, either.

MIKE: Maybe not. But here's what I think. I think you've got some problems right now. You got a low grade on your math test, or you had a fight with Jennifer, or Coach chewed you out at practice or something. Something went wrong and you're frustrated and unhappy, and then your friend got a cat so you blame Mom and Dad for everything that's wrong in your life.

HARRY: What are you, my personal shrink?

MIKE: You've always blamed Mom and Dad for everything that goes wrong.

HARRY: It's usually their fault.

MIKE: Wrong, bucko. Your problems are not Mom and Dad's fault. Having a kitten when you were four years old would not have helped you get an A in math or make the starting squad in basketball.

HARRY: You're simplifying it too much. It isn't just the kitten.

MIKE: There are a lot of kids with really rotten parents or no parents at all. You could have done much worse than Mom and Dad. At least they tried.

HARRY: *(False enthusiasm)* Hooray! Felix is dead! Long live his killers.

MIKE: I don't know why I bother talking to you.

HARRY: You know what's wrong with you? You have no sense of injustice. Someone can deliberately trample on your feelings, and you don't even care.

MIKE: Mom and Dad are not perfect. I'll grant you that. But they took us places when we were little. They played cards with us and read us stories. They bought us toys. They *tried*, which is more than a lot of parents do. They made mistakes, but they never deliberately trampled on our feelings.

HARRY: How could anyone take a defenseless little kitten to the animal shelter?

MIKE: In a few years, you'll be on your own and you can have as many cats as you want. You can go down to the animal shelter and adopt every stray kitten in the place.

HARRY: That won't bring Felix back.

MIKE: Neither will complaining about something that can't be changed.

HARRY: Ronnie got a cat now, not in a few years.

MIKE: Then visit him if you need to see a cat. Or call up the SPCA or one of the other animal protection agencies and ask if they need a volunteer. You could help all the other Felixes of the world. Do something constructive for a change, instead of moaning about how your life is ruined because Mom and Dad wouldn't let you keep a stray cat that you brought home when you were four years old.

HARRY: Remember when we had to change schools? When we couldn't go to John Quincy Adams School anymore?

MIKE: How could I *not* remember, with you here to remind me?

HARRY: Remember that? Is that an example of parents who care about their kids? I only had one good friend in the third grade. One friend! Jackson Smith. The one person I really cared about and who cared about me, and Mom and Dad made me leave him and go to a different school.

MIKE: Mom and Dad didn't make you go to a different school. The school board did. It wasn't Mom and Dad's fault that the district changed the boundaries and that we happened to live in an area that switched schools.

HARRY: They should have refused to transfer me. They should have picketed the school board.

MIKE: They went to the meetings. They said they preferred to have us stay at John Quincy Adams, and the school board said no. What did you want them to do—lie down in front of the school bus and refuse to move?

HARRY: My whole life would be different if I'd been allowed to stay at John Quincy Adams School.

MIKE: Now that is completely ridiculous. I had to change schools, too, you know. When you were in third grade, I was in second grade. I had to leave John Quincy and transfer to Elm Grove. I had to leave my friends, just the same as you. I didn't like it any better than you did.

HARRY: You didn't have Jackson Smith for a best friend.

MIKE: I made new friends. You moped around and told everyone within earshot that John Quincy Adams was a better school than Elm Grove.

HARRY: It was.

MIKE: The kids at Elm Grove didn't think so.

HARRY: I never had another friend that I liked as much as Jackson.

MIKE: How come you didn't stay in touch with him?

HARRY: When you're in the third grade and suddenly you don't see someone every day like you used to, you lose contact.

MIKE: We have a telephone. Even in the third grade you knew how to use it. Did you ever call him?

HARRY: What good would it have done? Mom and Dad . . .

MIKE: Call him now.

HARRY: Are you crazy? I haven't seen him since third grade.

MIKE: So? Call him up and say you got to thinking about how much fun you used to have in third grade and you were just wondering how he's doing. Maybe you could get together.

HARRY: I can't call Jackson after all these years.

MIKE: You can if you want to. You aren't helpless. If you don't like your situation, look for a solution. Quit blaming everyone else for your problems.

HARRY: I wish Mom and Dad were like Ronnie's parents.

MIKE: And I wish I had naturally curly hair.

HARRY: That's another thing! Remember when I decided to let my hair grow long and Mom made me get it cut? Remember that? It was in sixth grade, and she dragged me to the barber and he butched me, and I wore a paper bag on my head so no one would see my short hair. Do you remember that haircut?

MIKE: I don't remember the haircut. I do remember being embarrassed because my big brother was walking around with a paper bag over his face. Come to think of it, that's probably why I only got a C-plus on my English theme today. I couldn't do enough in-depth research because of the latent inhibitions brought on by acute embarrassment over my brother's behavior when he was in the sixth grade.

HARRY: That is the most ridiculous statement anyone has ever made. What does my behavior in sixth grade have to do with how well you write an English theme now?

MIKE: I rest my case.

33

WILL I KILL YOU, IF I HAVE TO?

CAST: Two players, TED and NAOKO.

AT RISE: TED and NAOKO stand a few feet apart, facing each other.

TED: I don't know you. Never met you. For me, you have no identity and no face. I know you by only one name: Enemy.

NAOKO: You. *You* are the enemy.

TED: My country and your country do not agree on anything except the fact that we must go to war with each other.

NAOKO: *(He turns to face audience.)* **It is my duty to serve in the war. I must fulfill my duty.**

TED: *(He turns to face audience.)* **I love my country. Always have. I love to hear "The Star Spangled Banner" before the ball game. I mean, where else but in the good old U.S. of A. can you have a hot dog at the ball park and watch the San Diego Chicken do tricks?**

NAOKO: My people have lived many hundreds of years on this land. My father was a farmer and his father before him. I will be a farmer, too, when the war is over.

TED: That's what I'll miss the most, in the war. Sports. But it'll be worth it. When I finish my time in the Army, I'll go to college and Uncle Sam will pay the bill.

NAOKO: I hope our land survives the war. Bombs and mines; they destroy land for many years. Nothing grows.

TED: That Sally ticks me off. I go over to tell her the big news that I've enlisted, and instead of getting excited, she starts to cry. "Killing is wrong," she says, "no matter what cause you're defending."

NAOKO: Farming is good. Farmers see growth and renewal. There is no growth and renewal in war.

TED: So I asked her how Hitler would have been stopped if no one had been willing to stand up and fight. Her only answer was, "You can't create peace by declaring war."

NAOKO: I am frightened. I wear the uniform, but I am not a soldier in my heart. In my heart, I am always a farmer.

TED: The land of the free and the home of the brave. "I am one of the brave," I told her, "and I'm proud to defend my country."

NAOKO: I hope I will not disgrace my family by acting cowardly.

TED: "They're people, too," she said. "They have families who love them. They hurt and bleed and die, the same as we do." Now, what kind of remark is that? I mean, I don't *want* to kill anybody. I'm no maniac murderer. I'm just willing to defend my country. That's all. Just doing a job that has to be done. I thought she'd be proud of me. Instead, she acts like it's a crime.

NAOKO: My mother weeps—my father turns away. They cannot bear to say goodbye, for they have seen war before.

TED: Maybe when I get back, there'll be a parade, with bands and flags, and everybody cheering. Then Sally will know what a hero is. Then she'll quit yakking about being a citizen of the world, instead of a citizen of the United States. I never heard of a parade for someone who calls themselves a citizen of the world.

NAOKO: I know there are farmers in America, too. Do they labor over their crops in dry years as we do? Do they struggle to save a sick animal?

TED: It'll be fast. I'll be back before I know it. We have bigger guns and faster planes and better technology.

NAOKO: How odd that we farmers should point guns at each other, when we are so much alike.

TED: They won't know what hit them.

NAOKO: Why can't our leaders resolve their differences? Why can't we find a peaceful solution?

(During next speech, TED and NAOKO slowly turn to face each other again.)

TED: I wonder if I'll ever actually have to kill someone. I mean,

I know I can do it if I have to, but I hope it won't be up close. Dropping a bomb is one thing. Pointing a gun at somebody's head . . . *(TED shakes his head, as if to get rid of such thoughts.)* **Geez, I'm getting as bad as Sally. I won't be pointing a gun at anybody except the enemy, so why should I worry?**

NAOKO: You. You are the enemy.

34

BASEBALL FANATIC

CAST: Two players, AL and GUS.

SETTING: GUS's home. GUS is On Stage at start.

(AL enters.)

AL: What are you doing? Do you want to do something together?

GUS: I'm going to watch the baseball game. You can watch it with me, if you want to.

AL: No, thanks. I thought we might rent a video or go get some peppermint chocolate chip ice cream.

GUS: Not me. I wouldn't leave now if the house was burning.

AL: I don't see what you're so excited about. It's only a baseball game.

GUS: Wrong. It is game five of the World Series.

AL: So? Neither of the teams is from around here. Why do you care who wins?

GUS: I don't care who wins.

AL: Then why watch?

GUS: Because it's a chance to see good baseball. Maybe even some *great* baseball. A triple play. A no-hitter. A grand slam.

AL: Think of all you could do in the three hours you're going to sit in front of the tube.

GUS: Like watch a video and eat ice cream?

AL: You could accomplish something.

GUS: I'll accomplish something tomorrow. Tonight, I'm watching the baseball game.

AL: By this time next year, you won't even remember who was playing.

GUS: Don't bet on it. My mother watched a no-hitter once, before she was married, and she still talks about that game. It's one of her most exciting memories.

AL: Your mother must lead a pretty dull life.

GUS: Not really. She has three kids, owns a small business, and is a volunteer for the Red Cross. She always has about six things going on at once.

AL: Oh.

GUS: But she still loves baseball.

AL: I suppose it relaxes her. Like a soap opera.

GUS: You've never watched a ball game with my mother or you wouldn't say it relaxes her. She can out-yell any three normal fans.

AL: Maybe that's why you're a baseball fanatic. It's in your genes.

GUS: I'm not a fanatic. I just happen to enjoy a sport.

AL: You wouldn't leave the game if the house was burning, but you aren't a fanatic.

GUS: Don't you have a hobby? What do you do in your spare time?

AL: I paint.

GUS: Good. You paint; I watch baseball.

AL: Painting uses my hands. And my mind.

GUS: I use my hands and my mind; I keep score.

AL: Writing down two numbers at the end of the game does not count as using your hands.

GUS: I score the whole game. You know, write down what every batter does each inning.

AL: Why would you want to do that?

GUS: Because it's interesting. That way, when player X comes up to bat in the sixth, I can look at my score card and know exactly what he did in his previous at-bats.

AL: You mean, if somebody strikes out, you write down, "struck out"?

GUS: No. If they strike out, I write "K." That's the symbol for strike out.

AL: You use a secret code?

GUS: It's no secret. Everyone knows that "K" means "strike out."

AL: I didn't.

GUS: Baseball fans know.

AL: It sounds childish. Kids love secret codes.

GUS: Kids like to paint, too.

AL: Painting has a tangible end result.

GUS: So does baseball.

AL: What? What do you have to show for your time after you watch a ball game?

GUS: Satisfaction. Three hours from now, I will be a happy person. Especially if I see a no-hitter or a great play.

AL: I suppose there's no use trying to change you.

GUS: That's right.

AL: If your own mother sets a bad example, you're probably a hopeless case.

GUS: I happen to think my mother set a good example. She taught me to have fun. To relax. She taught me that a well-balanced person takes time to enjoy life. Human batteries need to be recharged now and then. You do it by painting; I do it by watching the World Series.

AL: And you don't feel guilty?

GUS: For what? Why should I feel guilty?

AL: For wasting your time.

GUS: I'm not wasting time.

AL: I can see there's no point talking to you.

GUS: Good. The game's going to start, and I don't want to miss anything. *(AL shakes head in disgust and exits.)* Play ball!

35

NEW WAYS TO SAY NO

CAST: Two players, EILEEN and MERNA.

SETTING: No special setting required. EILEEN and MERNA are On Stage at start.

EILEEN: **I got in trouble again. No TV for a month.**

MERNA: **What did you do this time?**

EILEEN: **I got home late. My curfew was 10 o'clock, and I didn't get there until 11:30. My mother was ready to call the hospitals, to see if I'd been admitted.**

MERNA: **What happened? Why were you so late?**

EILEEN: **I went to the library with Kay and we met some friends of hers there, and they asked us to go out for pizza with them. I really didn't want to—I knew I'd be late if I went—but I could tell Kay wanted to go with them and I hated to be a party pooper.**

MERNA: **The last time you got grounded it was because you used your mother's charge card for that dress that you said you really didn't want, but the clerk talked you into buying.**

EILEEN: **The one my mother made me return.**

MERNA: **You could save yourself a lot of grief if you learned how to say no. Especially when it's something you don't want to do in the first place.**

EILEEN: **Easier said than done.**

MERNA: **Not if you practice. Tell you what. I will give you some lessons right now. New Ways to Say No. You may take notes if you wish so that you can practice when you're by yourself.**

EILEEN: **You're nuts.**

MERNA: **Maybe so, but I've found I get along a lot better since I've learned to say no to things that I don't want to do. Or would you rather continue to get grounded all the time?**

EILEEN: **All right. What do I have to do?**

MERNA: Lesson number one: This is for cases like last night, when someone is pressuring you to go somewhere and you know you should go home instead. This is what you say: "I'm sorry; I can't go. It really sounds like fun, but my mother worries herself sick when I get home late. You guys go on without me."

EILEEN: What if they keep arguing? What if they pressure me?

MERNA: Then you repeat, "I'm sorry; I can't go." Try it.

EILEEN: I'm sorry; I can't go.

MERNA: Again.

EILEEN: I'm sorry; I can't go.

MERNA: That wasn't so hard, was it?

EILEEN: Not with you. You aren't trying to get me to go anywhere.

MERNA: Lesson number two: This is for the times when you blurt out yes and then instantly wish you hadn't.

EILEEN: That's me. I do that all the time.

MERNA: The next time you do it, say: "I made a mistake. I should not have said yes, and I'll have to back out."

EILEEN: You have to be kidding. I could never say that.

MERNA: Sure you can. Practice it right now. Just say, "I made a mistake. I should not have said yes, and I have to back out."

EILEEN: I made a mistake. I should not have said yes, and I have to back out.

MERNA: Good! You're getting the hang of it. Lesson number three is for the times when you realize it's important for your own safety to say no, like when someone who has been drinking offers to drive you home or when somebody wants you to take drugs. You say: "I don't want to do that." Period. No reasons, no explanations, no arguments. Just say, "I don't want to do that."

EILEEN: I don't want to do that.

MERNA: If they keep insisting, or call you chicken, repeat the same thing: "I don't want to do that." Eventually, they'll give up and find someone else to hassle.

EILEEN: I don't want to do that.

MERNA: You got it. Lesson number four is easy. It's for when someone calls you and wants you to do something and you don't want to do it, even though you aren't doing anything else.

EILEEN: Yes! Like the other night. I had just made a big bowl of popcorn and was going to watch my favorite movie when Carrie called and wanted me to go ride bikes with her.

MERNA: What did you do?

EILEEN: I went. But it wasn't any fun. I just wasn't in the mood for riding my bike.

MERNA: Next time, say this: "Thanks for asking, but I've been super busy lately and I need a night by myself, just to be lazy."

EILEEN: She'd be insulted. That's like saying I would rather watch my movie alone than go bike riding with her.

MERNA: Wouldn't you?

EILEEN: Not always. But that night, yes, I wanted to watch my movie. Alone.

MERNA: Then you should have told her that. She wouldn't be offended. Everyone has times when they need to be alone. Say, "Thanks for asking, but I've been super busy lately and I need a night by myself, just to be lazy."

EILEEN: You make it sound so easy.

MERNA: It is easy, once you make up your mind. And after you say no, you'll have this incredible feeling of relief that you don't have to do something you don't want to do.

EILEEN: That would be a pleasant change. Usually, I feel resentful because I am doing something I don't want to do.

MERNA: Practice at home. Say the "no" phrases over and over until they come easily for you.

EILEEN: OK. I'll try it.

MERNA: Good luck.

EILEEN: Thanks. And thanks for your help.

MERNA: No problem. *(She starts to exit.)* I'll see you at seven on Saturday.

EILEEN: Seven?

MERNA: The river run, remember? Everyone is going to meet at seven Saturday morning and run the five miles along the river bank to the county park and then have a picnic breakfast.

EILEEN: I didn't know it was going to be so early. I have to babysit Friday night. I thought the river run was in the afternoon.

MERNA: Nope. It's seven in the morning. We want to run before it gets hot. See you there.

EILEEN: No.

MERNA: What?

EILEEN: I made a mistake. I should not have said yes, and I'll have to back out.

MERNA: You don't want to do the river run?

EILEEN: Not so early in the morning when I have to babysit late the night before. *(They look at each other for one beat. Then MERNA smiles.)*

MERNA: OK.

EILEEN: You aren't mad?

MERNA: How can I be mad? I'm the one who told you to say no. *(Both exit.)*

36

FLOWERS WON'T BRING BILLY BACK

CAST: Two players, HELEN and ANNE.

SETTING: Optional.

(ANNE is On Stage when scene opens. HELEN rushes in.)

HELEN: Have you heard the news?

ANNE: What news?

HELEN: About Margie's little brother?

ANNE: What about him? What happened?

HELEN: He died.

ANNE: Died! Are you sure?

HELEN: Mrs. Winthrop called my mom about an hour ago. When Margie's mother went to get Billy up this morning, she found him dead in his crib.

ANNE: Oh, that's terrible. I didn't even know he was sick.

HELEN: He wasn't. It was Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. It happens sometimes; for no reason at all, a perfectly healthy baby just quits breathing.

ANNE: Poor Margie. She was so excited when Billy was born. What are we going to do? How can we help?

HELEN: There's nothing anyone can do. He's already dead.

ANNE: I mean, what are we going to do for Margie?

HELEN: I guess we could send her a sympathy card.

ANNE: I think we should buy some flowers and go over to her house.

HELEN: Flowers won't bring Billy back.

ANNE: Maybe Margie wants someone to talk to.

HELEN: We'd be in the way. They probably don't want visitors now.

ANNE: We could just give our flowers to whoever answers the door and ask them to tell Margie we're there if she wants to see us but if she doesn't, we'll understand.

HELEN: Flowers wilt.

ANNE: We could collect money from everyone at school and

contribute it for research about Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

HELEN: Everyone I know is broke. Including me. We couldn't collect enough to make a difference in the research.

ANNE: But Margie and her family would know we tried to help.

HELEN: Have you ever tried to collect money for a charity? It takes forever. People say they want to contribute, but no one ever remembers to bring the money.

ANNE: Margie's parents must be devastated. She told me that they had wanted another baby ever since Margie was three years old.

HELEN: He was a cute little guy, too. Always grinning and drooling.

ANNE: I know! Let's bake muffins and take them over. Nobody in their family is going to feel like cooking, but sooner or later they'll get hungry.

HELEN: What if Margie thinks we're just snoopy? You know, like we want to come over and watch her cry.

ANNE: I don't want to watch Margie cry. I just want her to know that I feel bad, too. I wouldn't want her to think that nobody except her family cares that Billy died.

HELEN: It's just so awkward. I'm afraid I'll say the wrong thing.

ANNE: All I plan to say is, "I'm sorry."

HELEN: Still, it isn't the same as if an old person dies. You expect somebody's grandfather to die, but not their baby brother.

ANNE: All the more reason we should let Margie know that we're thinking about her.

HELEN: Let's go tell Julie the news. She's going to be so shocked. She even baby-sat with Billy a couple of times when Margie's folks came to watch Margie play in the volleyball games at school.

ANNE: You go ahead. I think I'll make those muffins and take

them over for Margie's family.

HELEN: What if they don't want to talk to you?

ANNE: Then I'll leave the muffins and come home.

HELEN: What if they get mad?

ANNE: They'll know I came out of love and concern. They'll understand that I want to show sympathy. How is Margie going to know how we feel if we don't tell her?

HELEN: Well, good luck. I'm going to go find Julie. *(She starts toward exit.)* **This is the worst tragedy that's ever happened to anyone I know.** *(She exits.)*

ANNE: I wonder if Margie likes blueberry muffins or banana muffins. Maybe I'll make some of each.

37

FRIENDS FOREVER

CAST: Two players, CINDY and DONNA.

AT RISE: CINDY and DONNA stand apart. Their words are directed to the audience, not to each other.

CINDY: We vowed we'd be friends forever. We said we'd always sit together at lunch and call each other every night and always tell each other everything.

DONNA: I feel bad about Cindy. I know I've hurt her feelings, and I don't know what to do about it.

CINDY: I never thought Donna would be like this. We used to have such fun. We used to be so close.

DONNA: She wants everything to stay just the same as it always was. Including me. But I can't stay the same. I've changed.

CINDY: We used to spend every Saturday together. We'd wash our hair and try out different styles. We'd browse through all the shops at the mall. We'd talk for hours. Donna never wants to spend time alone with me anymore. Every Saturday, she's busy with that dumb conservation group of hers.

DONNA: I invited Cindy to come with me one Saturday, but she said no. To tell the truth, I was relieved. She doesn't fit in with my new friends. It sounds snobbish to say this, but I don't know any other way to put it: I've outgrown Cindy. She still thinks the way we did when we were nine years old.

CINDY: I'm all for a clean environment and saving the earth and all of that, but my idea of fun is not volunteering at a recycle center. Who wants to work with all that trash?

DONNA: We don't have anything in common anymore. Cindy wants to talk about earrings and which cute boy said what and whether she should wear her blue sweater or her green one. The same things she talked about last week

and last year.

CINDY: Donna gets all worked up about politics and civil rights and conservation. If you ask me, all that's a waste of energy. One person can't change anything.

DONNA: Don't get me wrong. I like pretty clothes and boys, but they are not the focus of my life. I want to help improve our society. I want to make a difference.

CINDY: I suppose I should just forget about Donna and find someone else to hang out with. But it's hard to forget her. She was always so funny and bright. I always felt more alive when I was with her.

DONNA: A friend should accept you just the way you are, without wanting to change you. It's hard to do. If I accept Cindy as she is, I don't enjoy spending time with her. I keep wishing she would grow, mentally. I wouldn't even care if she disagreed with my opinions; at least we could have an interesting discussion. As it is now, she doesn't have any opinion about anything that matters. She's stagnant.

CINDY: The last time Donna and I ate lunch together, she acted bored. It's been months since we talked on the telephone for more than a few minutes. When I called her, she said she couldn't talk because she had to practice her speech. She ran for student body president and won.

DONNA: There is so much I want to do. Sometimes I feel like a volcano, bubbling and overflowing with ideas and plans and energy.

CINDY: I voted for her. She'll be a good president. There is so much she wants to accomplish. I'm not like that, and I never will be. I feel bad to lose Donna as my best friend. I'll probably never have another friend like her.

DONNA: I promised Cindy we'd be friends forever. At the time, I truly believed we would be. She'll always be special to me. I'll always care what happens to her. But I have to move on, without her.

CINDY: People should keep their promises.

38

STICKS AND STONES

CAST: Two players, MEGAN and SANDI.

SETTING: At school.

MEGAN: Oh, no. I got Mr. Carlson for English.

SANDI: What's wrong with Mr. Carlson? My sister had him last year, and she liked him.

MEGAN: He's a fag. Oh, great. I'll be spending an hour five times a week with a fag. *(SANDI turns away, offended, but says nothing.)* **What's the matter? Didn't you know he's a fag? I thought everyone in the whole school knew that.**

SANDI: Unless Mr. Carlson has posted a sign, I don't see how everyone in school could know his personal business. And even if he is gay, I don't think you should call him a fag. It's derogatory.

MEGAN: Well, don't get huffy. It's only a name.

SANDI: You had Mrs. Richards for math this year, didn't you?

MEGAN: Yes. I really liked her.

SANDI: Did you ever call her a nigger?

MEGAN: *(Shocked)* **No! Of course not. What a terrible thing to say.**

SANDI: I don't think it's any worse than calling Mr. Carlson a fag.

MEGAN: It isn't the same thing at all. Nigger is a horrible racial slur, and I'm surprised you would use it. How do you think Mrs. Richards would feel if she heard you?

SANDI: How do you think Mr. Carlson would feel if he heard you call him a fag?

MEGAN: Mrs. Richards can't help what color skin she was born with.

SANDI: And Mr. Carlson can't help what sexual preference he was born with.

MEGAN: Why are you defending him?

SANDI: Because I get tired of hearing kids make jokes about

gay people when they don't know anything about it.

MEGAN: And you do?

SANDI: As a matter of fact, yes, I do. My parents have some friends, Bill and Ken, who are gay. They're nice people. They're smart and kind and lots of fun.

MEGAN: And perverted.

SANDI: No! They've been together for almost twenty years. They own a house, and they have a little dog, and when you go to their home, you get a feeling that—that love exists there.

MEGAN: Oh, man! I never thought I'd hear someone like you talking about a couple of queers being in love.

SANDI: I've known Bill and Ken ever since I was a little kid. I always liked to see them when they came over for dinner because they didn't ignore me, like some of my parents' friends did. They always talked to me and *listened*, and sometimes they would bring me a little gift. It wasn't until last year that I began to suspect that Bill and Ken are a gay couple. I hinted around to my mother, and she told me, yes, they are.

MEGAN: I cannot imagine my parents inviting anyone like that to our house.

SANDI: Why not?

MEGAN: They might—you know, go after my little brother.

SANDI: There would be absolutely no chance of that.

MEGAN: How do you know?

SANDI: Because I know these people, and they are not child molesters.

MEGAN: I saw part of a Gay Rights parade on the news one night. Those people are disgusting.

SANDI: I saw that, too. I agree; they were too radical. But I've seen peace demonstrators get offensive, too. Also animal rights activitists and people on both sides of the abortion issue and lots of others. Just because some gays were loud and rude doesn't mean they all act that way. It's like judging all teenagers by the way gangs behave.

MEGAN: I don't see why you're defending them. *You* aren't gay, are you?

SANDI: No, I'm not.

MEGAN: I didn't think so, but people will start to think you are if you aren't careful how you talk.

SANDI: That's exactly what this conversation is all about—being careful how you talk.

MEGAN: I don't see why you're so touchy.

SANDI: Do you remember that movie we saw, about the Japanese Americans who were put in camps during World War II?

MEGAN: Yes. Talk about unfair!

SANDI: My grandma says she knew a Japanese family, and she can remember people calling them "dirty yellow Japs" and saying how terrible they were. The family she knew were all decent people and loyal citizens, and she realized it was unfair to blame them for something they hadn't done. But she never spoke up. Grandma says it's one of the few things she regrets in life—that she lacked the courage to defend her friends.

MEGAN: I don't see what your grandma has to do with Mr. Carlson.

SANDI: I'm trying not to repeat her mistake. Bill and Ken are my friends.

MEGAN: Do they carry purses?

SANDI: That is a stereotype. Bill and Ken look exactly like any of my parents' other friends. They dress the same. They talk the same.

MEGAN: What do they do? What kind of work?

SANDI: Bill's a hospital administrator, and Ken sells life insurance. They collect antique music boxes. They take their collection to nursing homes and put on programs for the patients. They're good people.

MEGAN: Well, I'm glad they're *your* friends and not mine.

SANDI: I'm glad they're my friends, too. That's why it bothered me to hear you insult Mr. Carlson. He's a good teacher. Whether he's gay or not, he doesn't deserve to be called "fag."

MEGAN: It's only a name. You know the old saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names can never hurt me."

SANDI: Not all old sayings are true.

MEGAN: Well, I still wish I had somebody else for English.

39

ALL I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS IS TO NOT BE PREGNANT

CAST: Two players, DENISE and STACY.

(As scene opens, DENISE and STACY are seated together.)

DENISE: Thanks for coming over.

STACY: What happened? What's so important?

DENISE: I'm pregnant.

STACY: Are you positive?

DENISE: I got one of those little kits at the drug store, where you can test yourself.

STACY: Have you told Brian?

DENISE: Not yet.

STACY: What about your parents?

DENISE: Are you kidding? I haven't told anybody, except you.

STACY: When are you going to tell them?

DENISE: Never.

STACY: Sooner or later, they'll find out.

DENISE: Maybe not. Not if I have an abortion.

STACY: Is that what you want to do?

DENISE: No. But I don't want to have a baby, either.

STACY: What other options are there?

DENISE: I could kill myself.

STACY: Oh, Denise. Don't say that. You're too bright. You have too much to live for.

DENISE: If I'm so bright, how come I'm pregnant?

STACY: Everybody makes mistakes.

DENISE: I really didn't think it would happen to me. *(Slams fist into other palm.)* Why weren't we more careful? I know about birth control. Why didn't we use it?

STACY: There's no point questioning what's already done.

DENISE: I'm scared.

STACY: I don't blame you. But I'll help you. So will your parents; I'm sure of it.

DENISE: I can't tell them. Just thinking about it makes me want to throw up.

STACY: You probably want to throw up because you're pregnant.

DENISE: And Grandma. Who's going to tell Grandma? She's coming for Christmas, and now I'm going to spoil her whole visit.

STACY: If you killed yourself, it would spoil her whole life. To say nothing of what it would do to your parents.

DENISE: I won't kill myself.

STACY: Promise?

DENISE: Promise.

STACY: Good.

DENISE: Maybe I'll get hit by a cement truck.

STACY: The first thing you need to do is tell Brian. And then your folks. Let them help you decide what to do.

DENISE: I won't get married. Even if Brian says he wants to marry me, I won't do it like this. For the rest of my life, I'd know the only reason he married me was because I was pregnant.

STACY: He'd think the same thing—that the only reason you married him was because you were pregnant.

DENISE: Maybe I won't tell him.

STACY: This is his problem, too. You didn't get pregnant alone, you know.

DENISE: It may be his problem, but it's my body. Eight months from now, he isn't going to look any different.

STACY: I think you should go to the doctor. Be positive that you are pregnant before you tell anyone.

DENISE: I'm afraid Dr. Winston will tell my folks. He's known them for years. He plays golf with Dad.

STACY: Then go to someone you don't know. Go to Planned Parenthood.

DENISE: Have you ever had a pelvic exam?

STACY: No.

DENISE: Neither have I. It sounds awful.

STACY: It can't be too bad. Millions of women have them every year.

DENISE: When I decided to have sex with Brian, I thought I was so sophisticated. Every time we did it, I felt smug and grown-up. It was my big secret from the world.

STACY: You could talk to one of the counselors at school.

DENISE: What would you do, if you were me? Would you have an abortion?

STACY: I don't know what I would do. Even if I did, my decision wouldn't necessarily be the right one for you.

DENISE: What if I had an abortion and then later, years from now when I'm grown up and ready to have a baby, I can't get pregnant? My parents know these people who have been trying for ten years to have a baby. They've spent thousands of dollars on fertility clinics, and she still isn't pregnant. What if that happens to me?

STACY: You can't worry about every faint possibility. You got pregnant easily this time . . .

DENISE: Too easily.

STACY: Chances are you could do it again.

DENISE: Do you hate me?

STACY: Of course not. No one else is going to hate you, either.

DENISE: Grandma is.

STACY: She might be shocked at first, but she won't hate you.

DENISE: Shocked. And disappointed. I've let everybody down.

STACY: If you want me to be here when you tell your folks, let me know and I'll come over.

DENISE: If I have a girl, I'll name her Stacy.

STACY: Just don't name the baby Stacy if it's a boy.

DENISE: I don't want to have an abortion. I want to know if it's a boy or a girl. I've only known for a few hours and already I think of it as a little person. A real baby.

STACY: Lots of single women raise children by themselves.

DENISE: Not when they're sixteen. That wouldn't be best for the baby. I'm not ready. I wouldn't be a good parent. Not yet.

STACY: You could put it up for adoption. There are lots of couples like your parents' friends who would be thrilled to adopt your baby.

DENISE: Would I be able to do it? Could I actually hand over my baby to a stranger?

STACY: You could if you decide that's the best option. And it wouldn't be a stranger; it would be someone from an adoption agency. It would be a social worker that you know.

DENISE: Two weeks ago, all I wanted for Christmas was a compact disc player. Now all I want is to not be pregnant.

STACY: There are some things even Santa can't manage.

40

THE LAST DAY OF SCHOOL: TWO VIEWPOINTS

CAST: Two players, BRUCE and CHARLEY.

This is not a true dialog; it is two monologs delivered at the same time, with the speakers alternating lines.

AT RISE: BRUCE and CHARLEY are On Stage at start. They speak to the audience, not to each other. They act as if they do not hear each other.

BRUCE: Finally! The last day of ninth grade. I thought today would never come.

CHARLEY: Another school year is almost over. Where did the time go?

BRUCE: Every year the days drag worse than the year before.

CHARLEY: It seems like football practice barely got started and, all of a sudden, we're finishing up track and basketball.

BRUCE: Biology was the worst. Who needs to know all that junk? And English! What could be more boring than books that were written one hundred years ago?

CHARLEY: Biology was the hardest class I ever had—but I learned a lot. English, too. I didn't think I'd like reading those old books by Mark Twain, but they were great. I suppose that's why they're still popular, a century later.

BRUCE: Why don't they ever teach us anything useful, like how to balance a checkbook?

CHARLEY: The lifestyles class was my favorite. We learned to compare prices and how to apply for a loan and lots of other practical skills. Too bad more kids didn't sign up for it. They should make lifestyles class required, instead of optional.

BRUCE: It's raining again. You might know it would rain on the last day of school and spoil the class picnic.

CHARLEY: Looks like the class picnic will have to be in the gym this year. It's a good thing we made an alternate plan.

BRUCE: Plan B says, "If it rains, the picnic will be held in the gym." How can we have a picnic in the gym? Picnics are supposed to be outside.

CHARLEY: At least we won't have to worry about ants in the potato salad.

BRUCE: My picture in the annual is terrible. Why didn't I get my hair cut?

CHARLEY: The annuals are the best ever. They have pictures of the school play and the young authors' conference, and there's a terrific shot of the basketball team getting the trophy for good sportsmanship.

BRUCE: That picture makes me look like a cross between Count Dracula and an Old English sheep dog.

CHARLEY: Some day I'll show this to my grandchildren, to prove that I didn't always have wrinkles.

BRUCE: I don't know why I even buy an annual. Every year, it's the same old garbage.

CHARLEY: Maybe next year I'll offer to help with the annual. It must be really satisfying to produce a book that means so much to everyone.

BRUCE: I suppose all the kids will be getting autographs from their friends, as usual. What a waste of time. Nobody ever writes anything clever or original. They all say the same thing: "Have a good summer."

CHARLEY: Someday we'll look back at these annuals and read what our friends wrote to us and remember how much fun school was.

BRUCE: How can I have a good summer when I'm stuck going to summer school? I planned to sleep in every morning, but, oh no, my folks insisted that I take some stupid computer class that shoots practically my whole day.

CHARLEY: Always before on the last day of school, I wondered what I was going to do for the next three months. This year, I signed up for a six-week summer school computer course. It's three hours every morning, and I get a full semester credit, and I'll still have all afternoon free to play tennis or go swimming.

BRUCE: I'm so glad to be finished with Mr. Shelton and the rest. If I never see another teacher again, it would be fine with me.

CHARLEY: Maybe I'll ask a couple of the teachers to sign my annual, too.

BRUCE: I should have complained to the principal about Mr. Shelton. Isn't there some kind of a law against psychological abuse? Where does he get off telling me if I want to make it in the world, I'd better change my attitude? There's nothing wrong with my attitude.

CHARLEY: Mr. Shelton. I'll ask Mr. Shelton to sign my annual. Everyone complains how tough he is and calls him Mr. Skeleton, but I didn't think biology was *that* bad, and Mr. Shelton always volunteered to chaperone our dances.

BRUCE: The last day of school. Three more hours and then I'm out of here.

CHARLEY: The last day of school. You know, I kind of hate to see it end.

Playlets

play tennis or go swimming.

BRUCE: I'm so glad to be finished with Mr. Shelton and the rest. If I never see another teacher again, it would be fine with me.

CHARLEY: Maybe I'll ask a couple of the teachers to sign my annual, too.

BRUCE: I should have complained to the principal about Mr. Shelton. Isn't there some kind of a law against psychological abuse? Where does he get off telling me if I want to make it in the world, I'd better change my attitude? There's nothing wrong with my attitude.

CHARLEY: A shame. Please Mr. [illegible] sign my annual. Everyone [illegible] how could he [illegible] calls him Mr. [illegible] and Mr. Shelton always [illegible] suspended our dances.

BRUCE: [illegible] three more years and then I'm out of here.

CHARLEY: The last day of school. You know, I kind of hate to see it end.

HEARTBEATS
DEAR BILL/DEAR ASHLEY
ONE EVERY TWENTY-TWO MINUTES
SISTERLY LOVE
WIN, LOSE OR LEARN
THE SIMPLE LIFE
NO EASY ANSWERS
JUST A JOB
A BABY OF MY OWN
THE INHERITANCE
SOMEBODY SHOULD DO SOMETHING
TRANSFORMATION
STANDARD ANSWERS
INVISIBLE BOXES
FIVE MINUTES TO CHANGE THE WORLD
ONLY A FEW BEERS
RED ROSES FOR A DEAD CAT
SOMEDAY LIFE WILL BE SWEET
DEAR JAN SLANDER
DOMINOES

41

HEARTBEATS

CAST: Three males, three females: DON, WESLEY, ED, EVELYN, JUDY, SHIRLEY.

SETTING: No special setting necessary. If possible, all actors should wear long-sleeved shirts, cotton gloves, and aprons. All are splattered with oil.

(All enter together, obviously weary.)

EVELYN: I have never been so tired in my life.

DON: Me either. How long have you been here?

EVELYN: Ten hours. I was only supposed to work a six-hour shift, but I couldn't leave when there were so many birds that needed help.

JUDY: Same here. Reading about the oil spill in the newspaper did not give me a clue to the horror of it.

ED: I know what you mean. I saw a newscast on TV that showed all the birds—that's why I came to volunteer—but even seeing it on television didn't prepare me to actually hold a trembling, frightened bird in my two hands. And I sure wasn't prepared to have to pry open its beak and insert a feeding tube.

WESLEY: I could actually feel their hearts beating. Rapid at first, beating fast with fear, and then gradually slowing as they received food.

SHIRLEY: That's what I didn't expect: the fear. Their fear is a threat to them now—maybe even more than the oil.

DON: Tell me about it. One bird pecked me on the wrist so hard it drew blood. Got its beak right between my glove and my shirt sleeve.

EVELYN: You should sing to them. Croon a soft little song, like a mother rocking her baby to sleep.

DON: I learned that later, after I got pecked.

JUDY: There are so many of them. We work until we can hardly see straight and it still isn't enough.

SHIRLEY: It's better than nothing. I had to scrub most of them with a soapy toothbrush, the oil was so thick. All day, I kept telling myself if I wasn't doing this, the birds would die.

JUDY: I used cotton swabs to go around the rims of their eyelids. I could tell they hated it but it had to be done. Imagine having black oil in your eyes. *(She shudders.)*

SHIRLEY: When I first got here, I intended to count how many I cleaned. I thought I'd be able to do a hundred birds or even more in one day. But they were such a mess! Some of them didn't even look like birds when I started on them. If I had seen them somewhere else, I would have thought they were just a tarry mound of feathers. It took me at least an hour to do each bird.

ED: It's a good thing the feeding goes faster than that or they'd starve to death waiting their turn.

EVELYN: What was that stuff you were feeding them?

DON: Something called trout chow. It's mixed with vegetable oil and Gatorade. All whirled together in a blender until it's smooth enough to slip right down their throats.

JUDY: Yuck. It sounds terrible.

WESLEY: The birds don't complain.

SHIRLEY: Have you gone out to see the testing ponds?

DON: Not yet.

ED: I haven't had time.

EVELYN: What testing ponds?

SHIRLEY: It's where they take the liveliest birds, after they've been cleaned and fed. It's a test, to see if they might be able to make it on their own. If there's any oil or soap residue on their feathers, the birds can't float. They can't fly, either. They can't even stay warm.

EVELYN: So they put them in the ponds awhile, to make sure they're OK before they get released?

SHIRLEY: That's right. I went out there yesterday and there was a whole group of them swimming around. It was a thrill, knowing that without our volunteer clean-up group, none of those birds would have lived.

DON: Five hundred thousand gallons of oil. And that's just this time. How many oil spills have there been?

JUDY: How many more will there be?

ED: When I see all of these terrified, suffering wild birds, it makes me almost ashamed to be a human.

EVELYN: I suppose that's why we're here. We're trying to make amends because our species has caused such suffering to these other species.

SHIRLEY: I'm going home. If I don't get some sleep, I won't be able to lift another bird.

JUDY: Are you coming again tomorrow?

ALL OTHERS: Yes. *(They smile and nod at each other.)*

DON: How could I stay away, now that I know how bad it is?

WESLEY: As long as I live, I'll remember how those heartbeats feel.

ED: Pounding with fear in the palms of our hands. *(All exit.)*

42

DEAR BILL/ DEAR ASHLEY

CAST: Two males, two females. BILL, JIM, ASHLEY, SUSAN.

AT RISE: BILL and JIM stand together at one side of playing area. ASHLEY and SUSAN stand together on the other side. ASHLEY and BILL each hold a writing tablet and a pencil.

ASHLEY: This is the hardest letter I've ever written. He is going to be absolutely crushed.

BILL: I feel like a rat. Maybe I shouldn't write at all.

JIM: You can't do that. That would be harder on her than knowing the truth.

SUSAN: Just be honest with him. If Bill's as nice as you say he is, he'll understand.

ASHLEY: He is nice. Or at least he was. I can hardly remember what he's like. Isn't that incredible? When we moved, I thought I'd never forget Bill. I planned to go back to Iowa after I graduate and attend college with him. I thought—I really thought some day Bill and I would get married. And now, only eight months later, I can hardly remember him.

BILL: "Dear Ashley: Sorry I haven't written for awhile, but I've been super busy."

JIM: With Melissa.

BILL: I can see you're going to be a big help.

ASHLEY: Absence is supposed to make the heart grow fonder. I must have a character flaw.

SUSAN: It's perfectly natural to make new friends. Bill wouldn't want you to spend the rest of your high school career moping around, being lonesome for him. He probably wants you to date other guys.

ASHLEY: No way. We promised each other that distance wouldn't make any difference. We swore we'd always love each other, no matter how long it was before we were together again. This is going to break his heart.

JIM: Maybe she'll be relieved. Maybe she wants to go out with somebody else, too, and is afraid of letting you down.

BILL: Are you kidding? She's still planning for us to go to college together. We even talked about—about being together permanently.

JIM: So, tell her you changed your mind. Tell her you decided not to go to college, after all. Say you're going to drop out of school and become a beach bum.

BILL: I can't lie to Ashley. I'll get right to the point and tell her the truth. *(He starts to write again.)* "I need to tell you something, and I wish you were here so I could do it in person, except if you were here I wouldn't have to tell you this."

JIM: Maybe you should call her.

SUSAN: I moved when I was in the fourth grade. My best friend, Missy, and I swore we'd write every day. I got two letters from her.

ASHLEY: That's terrible.

SUSAN: I agree. She got *three* letters from me.

ASHLEY: That was fourth grade. You expect kids in fourth grade to forget.

SUSAN: Do you want me to write the letter for you? "Dear Bill: I've been lonely and, even though I haven't met anyone I like as much as you, I've decided to date other guys. I hope you'll understand and feel free to go out, too." There. All written. All you have to do is put it on paper.

ASHLEY: That isn't exactly true. I have met someone else. That's the problem.

SUSAN: "Dear Bill: I met this terrific guy named Kevin, and we're practically going steady. Just thought you'd like to know."

ASHLEY: You know what really bothers me about this whole thing? What if I keep doing this? What if, every time I meet a new guy I think I'm in love and then a few months later I change my mind? I'll be one of those people with eight divorces.

BILL: What if she tries to kill herself?

JIM: She won't. I never saw her act the least depressed.

BILL: She never got jilted before.

JIM: She's too smart to let one disappointment ruin her whole life.

BILL: *(Writing again)* "I will always care about you, and I hope we can stay friends."

JIM: Even though you probably hate me right at this moment.

SUSAN: Pretend I'm Bill. Say it to me.

ASHLEY: I'm sorry to hurt you, but I have to be honest and tell you I've been dating somebody else. I hope you'll try to understand.

SUSAN: Perfect. Write it down. *(ASHLEY writes.)*

JIM: It isn't fair, you know. You're worried about how to get rid of an extra girlfriend, and I've never gone out with anyone.

BILL: Why don't you write to Ashley? Maybe you and she . . .

JIM: Forget it. I want a girlfriend that's here in the flesh. Lots of nice, curvy flesh.

BILL: Like Melissa.

ASHLEY: There. It's done.

SUSAN: Just in time. Here comes Kevin.

ASHLEY: *(Waves)* Hi, Kevin. *(She runs Off Stage.)*

BILL: *(Hands letter to JIM.)* Could you mail this for me? I'm supposed to meet Melissa, and I'm already late. *(He exits.)*

SUSAN: Poor Bill.

JIM: Poor Ashley.

43

ONE EVERY TWENTY-TWO MINUTES

CAST: Four players: BECKY, TODD, JAMES, ANITA.

BECKY and TODD are ghosts. They have white sheets draped over their heads and (optional) white face makeup. They cannot speak; JAMES and ANITA cannot see them. However, the ghosts react to what JAMES and ANITA say.

AT RISE: BECKY and TODD enter, from opposite sides. They move slowly, as if floating. They do not see each other. Before they reach the center of the playing area, they stop and face the audience.

(JAMES and ANITA enter, talking, and go forward until they are standing in between the ghosts.)

ANITA: I just can't believe it. Yesterday, Becky and I were making plans to go on a camping trip this summer. Now she's dead.

JAMES: Two friends in one week.

ANITA: I had never been to a funeral until I went to Todd's. It was the hardest thing I ever did, and now there'll be another one.

JAMES: I keep thinking about what the minister said at Todd's service—that every twenty-two minutes a teenager is killed as a result of drunken driving. When I heard that, it seemed like an exaggeration. I'm sixteen years old, and Todd was the first person I ever knew who was killed by a drunk driver. But now, just a week later, Becky is gone. It's as if the statistics are making up for the years when I didn't lose any friends.

ANITA: It makes you wonder who's next.

JAMES: Exactly.

ANITA: It seems even worse this time.

JAMES: How could it be?

ANITA: Because it wasn't Becky's fault. With Todd, it was at least partly his own fault. *(TODD cringes and grimaces.)*

JAMES: Todd didn't want to die. *(TODD vigorously shakes his head no.)*

ANITA: Of course not. But he *had* been drinking.

JAMES: Just beer. At a private party. Todd wasn't a big boozer.

ANITA: I don't mean to talk against Todd. I liked Todd a lot. I had a secret crush on him all through seventh grade. *(TODD and BECKY look amazed. TODD points to himself, as if to say, "On me?" He is pleased by this news.)* But no matter how much we liked him, the fact is he had been drinking that night and then he lost control of the car on his way home. *(TODD hangs his head.)* It's hard to blame anyone but Todd for the fact that he was killed.

JAMES: Todd would never have committed suicide. *(TODD again shakes his head no.)*

ANITA: Not with pills or a gun, but the result is the same.

JAMES: Yes, I guess it is. And it's the same for his family. I went over to Todd's house to return a book I had borrowed from him. His mother couldn't even talk to me. All she did was cry. *(TODD covers his ears, unable to bear it.)*

ANITA: It's terrible for Becky's family, too. Becky didn't drink. It's so unfair that she should die this way. *(BECKY hugs herself and rocks back and forth in sorrow.)* She was walking across the street, with a green light, on her way to a baby-sitting job.

JAMES: How could that woman not see a red light at 5 o'clock in the afternoon? How could she not see a person in the middle of the crosswalk? That lady is going to have the book thrown at her in court.

ANITA: That won't bring Becky back. *(BECKY stops rocking. She looks up, slowly shaking her head no.)* And the worst of it is, that woman had already been arrested once before for drunken driving.

JAMES: I was thinking of asking Becky to go out with me. I was trying to get up my nerve to ask her. *(BECKY reacts* *with surprise and pleasure.)*

ANITA: She would have said yes. I know she would. *(BECKY nods her head yes. She smiles.)*

JAMES: Well, it's too late now. *(BECKY's smile fades.)* I've felt weird ever since I first heard about Todd. I know accidents happen and I know people die, but, somehow, until now, it just never seemed like the one person every twenty-two minutes would be someone I know.

ANITA: Or you.

JAMES: Or me.

ANITA: It makes me feel vulnerable.

JAMES: It made me decide not to drink anymore. *(TODD raises a fist in congratulations.)*

ANITA: Becky didn't drink, either. *(BECKY shrugs helplessly.)*

JAMES: I'm going to miss both of them.

ANITA: Yes. And think how much *they* are going to miss.

JAMES: Graduation.

ANITA: College.

JAMES: Careers. Todd wanted to do work with artificial intelligence. He was a whiz with computers.

ANITA: Becky wanted to be a lawyer.

JAMES: Marriage.

ANITA: Kids.

JAMES: Everything. *(During the next two lines, ANITA and JAMES exit. Ghosts watch them leave.)*

ANITA: Everything. They are going to miss the whole rest of their lives.

JAMES: The whole rest of their lives. *(BECKY and TODD slowly turn and move Off Stage, the same way they came in.)*

44

SISTERLY LOVE

CAST: Three sisters: ALLISON, TRUDY, JEAN. JEAN is youngest.

SETTING: Minimal—any room in family home. Need only a couple of chairs and a telephone.

(ALLISON and TRUDY are On Stage at start of scene.)

ALLISON: Here she comes. Don't forget—no matter what she says or does, we pretend we don't hear her or see her.

TRUDY: This is really going to get to her. Especially if Sue remembers to call in a few minutes.

ALLISON: Maybe it will teach her a lesson about blabbing other people's secrets. Especially ours.

TRUDY: Shh. *(JEAN enters.)*

JEAN: Hi. What are you guys doing?

ALLISON: And then Mr. Hammer assigned two book reports for this week.

JEAN: I did a book report last week.

TRUDY: I don't mind book reports, as long as they're written.

JEAN: How come you have to do two in one week?

ALLISON: I agree. Oral reports make me nervous.

JEAN: Mine was oral. I got a B. I would have had an A, but I talked too long.

ALLISON: I'm going to the library. Do you want to come?

TRUDY: Sure. I always like to go to the library.

JEAN: Me, too. I'll go with you.

ALLISON: Let's ride our bikes.

TRUDY: Great idea. My thighs need the exercise.

JEAN: What about me? Mom won't let me ride that far yet. I have to walk with someone or take the bus.

TRUDY: I'll take my tote bag; it fits on the bike carrier.

JEAN: What about me? I want to go with you.

ALLISON: We'd better leave a note, so Mom knows where we are.

TRUDY: It's a good thing Jean isn't here. She'd want to tag along.

JEAN: I *am* here. I'm standing right next to you.

ALLISON: I wonder where she is. She's usually home by now.

TRUDY: Maybe she went home with Jennifer.

JEAN: What's the matter with you? Are you blind and deaf all of a sudden?

ALLISON: Actually, it's rather nice without her. For once we can talk without worrying that she's going to eavesdrop and then blab everything we say to anyone who'll listen.

JEAN: I don't do that!

TRUDY: Our sister, the spy.

ALLISON: Of course, she's younger than we are.

TRUDY: When she's more mature, maybe she'll learn to keep her mouth shut.

JEAN: I am mature. And if you guys don't quit ignoring me, I'm going to tell Mom.

ALLISON: Have you read any good books lately? Something I would like? I may as well do my reports on books that are interesting.

TRUDY: I haven't read anything but my biology text for weeks.

JEAN: I read one called *Sisters, Long Ago*. It was good.

ALLISON: That's why I didn't take biology. Too much memorizing.

JEAN: You guys are ignoring me on purpose, aren't you?

TRUDY: I'll look for a novel at the library. I need a break from biology.

JEAN: You think if you pretend I'm not here, I'll leave. *(The phone rings. ALLISON answers.)*

ALLISON: Hello? No, she isn't here. Can I take a message?

JEAN: Is that for me?

ALLISON: I don't know when she'll be back. She isn't home from school yet.

JEAN: *(She grabs for phone.)* Give me that. *(ALLISON hangs up.)*

That was for me, wasn't it?

TRUDY: Who was it?

ALLISON: Somebody for Jean.

JEAN: I knew it. I knew it was for me.

TRUDY: Probably Jennifer.

ALLISON: It was a boy.

JEAN: A boy? A boy called for me, and you said I wasn't here? When Mom gets home, you guys are going to be in big trouble.

TRUDY: Maybe we should run next door and tell the Smithburg kids that Jean got a phone call from a boy.

JEAN: Don't you dare!

ALLISON: That's what she would do, if the call had been for one of us.

JEAN: Once. Just once I told the Smithburgs.

TRUDY: Let's do it.

JEAN: No! Kevin Smithburg is in my class. He'll tell the whole school. No boy will ever call me again.

ALLISON: While we're at it, let's be sure to write to Uncle Bill and tell him, too.

TRUDY: Good idea. That way, the next time he talks to Dad, he can mention that he understands Jean has a boyfriend, and Dad can have an anxiety attack.

JEAN: I didn't write to Uncle Bill. He called and I happened to answer the phone, and when he asked me what was new, I couldn't think of anything else to say.

ALLISON: Let's go. I want enough time at the library, and it may take awhile at the Smithburgs'.

JEAN: *(On the verge of tears)* No!

TRUDY: Let's wait and go over there after we get back. Kevin's at basketball practice now. *(TRUDY and ALLISON rise and start to leave. JEAN suddenly gasps and clutches her chest. She collapses on the floor. TRUDY and ALLISON rush to her and kneel beside her.)* What's wrong? What happened?

ALLISON: Maybe she had a heart attack. *(JEAN is unrespon-*

sive, eyes closed.) You don't think we upset her so much she had a heart attack, do you?

TRUDY: I'm going to call 9-1-1. *(She grabs telephone.)*

ALLISON: What if she's just acting? What if she's pretending she's sick to get even with us for ignoring her?

TRUDY: *(Hesitates)* What if she isn't pretending?

ALLISON: Call 9-1-1. I'll do CPR. *(TRUDY starts to dial. ALLISON tilts JEAN's head back and sticks her finger in JEAN's mouth.)*

JEAN: *(Turns her head away)* Blah. Get your hand out of my mouth. *(TRUDY quickly hangs up. ALLISON jumps to her feet.)*

TRUDY: You little fake!

JEAN: *(Stands)* Me? You're calling me a fake? You've been pretending all day that you couldn't see me or hear me.

ALLISON: We should have left her lying on the floor.

TRUDY: Next time, we will.

JEAN: There isn't going to be any next time. I'm never talking to either of you again.

TRUDY: Good.

ALLISON: Wait till Mom gets home and finds out you faked a heart attack and let us call 9-1-1. That's just as bad as a false fire alarm.

JEAN: You didn't call. You stopped before they answered.

ALLISON: Only because you didn't want my finger in your mouth. If I hadn't done that, you would have let an ambulance come. Probably some old man would have died because all the medics were over here and couldn't help him in time.

JEAN: If you tell Mom that, I'll tell her why I had to do it. I'll tell her about my phone call. I'll tell her everything you did.

TRUDY: You will anyway. You always do. You follow us around like a private investigator, and then you blab every detail to anyone who'll listen.

JEAN: *(Starts to cry)* If you would include me once in awhile, maybe I wouldn't. *(ALLISON and TRUDY look at each other,* *surprised by this remark.)* It's always two against one, and I'm the one. How do you think I feel when I'm treated like an outcast by my own family? No matter where you're going, if I want to go, too, you say no. You act like I have a contagious disease or like I'm some kind of freak and you're ashamed to be seen with me.

ALLISON: Oh, come on. It isn't that bad.

JEAN: Yes, it is. I can't help it that I'm younger than you. You always have each other, and I never have anybody.

TRUDY: You have Jennifer. *(She gets tissue and hands it to Jean.)*

JEAN: That isn't the same. She doesn't live here.

ALLISON: You have to admit, you do follow us around and listen to what we say.

JEAN: I just want to be with you. I want you to like me.

TRUDY: We do like you.

JEAN: No you don't.

ALLISON: If we didn't, we wouldn't have tried to help when we thought you were sick.

JEAN: I won't repeat anything you say, ever again.

TRUDY: Promise?

JEAN: Promise.

ALLISON: And you won't tattle to Mom and Dad all the time?

JEAN: Never.

ALLISON: OK. You can go to the library with us. We'll walk.

JEAN: Who called for me?

ALLISON: Nobody called for you.

JEAN: You said a boy called for me. Did he give his name?

TRUDY: It wasn't a boy. It was Sue.

JEAN: Allison answered. She said it was a boy and he asked for me.

ALLISON: It was Sue. We told her to call.

JEAN: *(Stares at them for a second, stunned, as she realizes what really happened)* That's the meanest trick I ever heard of! I'm telling Mom!

TRUDY: Are you? *(They all look at each other.)*

JEAN: No.

ALLISON: Let's go.

JEAN: Actually, if you had done that to anyone but me, I would think it was funny.

TRUDY: Maybe she really is getting mature.

ALLISON: Finally. *(They exit together.)*

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WIN, LOSE OR LEARN

CAST: Four players: MATT, STEVE, TONY, RICKY.
No special setting necessary.
(MATT, STEVE and TONY are On Stage as scene opens.)

MATT: We could have beat them. If Coach Girard had let the first string finish the game, we would have won.

STEVE: No question. We had them. But, oh no, Coach had to let everybody have their turn to play.

MATT: It's the most stupid coaching policy I've ever heard of. You don't see professional coaches making sure every player has a chance to play in every game.

STEVE: I couldn't believe it when he took me out and put Ricky Schuster in. Ricky Schuster hasn't made a free throw the entire season. He just barely made the team.

MATT: Maybe Coach had a big bet on this game. Maybe he has a secret gambling problem, and he had to make sure we lost so he could collect the money and pay his debts.

TONY: Oh, come on, Matt. You know that isn't true. He just feels strongly that every person on the team should get some playing time. If you were a sub instead of being on the starting team, you'd probably like his policy.

MATT: Not if it meant we had to lose the biggest game of the season by two points. Two lousy points! And all because the worst players on the entire squad got to play the last five minutes.

TONY: Those guys come to practice every day. They work just as hard as we do.

STEVE: Sure, they come to practice. But that doesn't make them good players. At least, not good enough to go in for the final five minutes of the most important game of the season.

MATT: My dad is going to have a fit. The last time we lost a game because of this dumb rule, Dad threatened to com-

plain to the school board. This time, he'll do it. I know he will. I could hear him booing.

STEVE: Maybe the school board will overrule Coach.

MATT: Or fire him.

TONY: Is that what you want? You told me Coach Girard has done more to help you improve your game than any other coach you've ever had.

MATT: I'm not saying he's a bad coach. I'm just saying he has a rotten philosophy about who gets to play. What's so important about sending Ricky Schuster in for five minutes so he can miss two free throws, double dribble, and throw the ball straight into the hands of the other team's center?

TONY: Shhh. Here comes Ricky. He'll hear you. *(He points. MATT and STEVE look. RICKY enters.)*

RICKY: Hi, guys.

OTHERS: Hi, Ricky.

RICKY: Sorry about the game.

TONY: Yeah.

RICKY: I wanted to play my best today. My grandparents came over a hundred miles just to see the game. I was really hoping I'd make those free throws.

MATT: So were we.

TONY: Maybe next time.

MATT: I doubt it.

RICKY: It's so frustrating. At home, I practice free throws, and I sink eighty percent of them. Swish! Straight through the net. Then I get in a tight game, and I don't know what happens.

MATT: I do. You miss.

TONY: Lay off, Matt. He feels bad enough.

RICKY: At least I got in for a few minutes. I would have really felt terrible if Grandpa and Grandma came so far to watch me play and then I never even got in the game.

MATT: Don't they care that your team lost?

RICKY: Well, naturally, they'd like to see us win. But they agree with Coach Girard's philosophy that the important thing is for each player to try to play up to his best potential. If you win, that's icing on the cake.

STEVE: Was today your best potential?

RICKY: No way. Coach says I need more experience. He says my coordination was slow to develop, but if I keep practicing, I'll be a good player someday.

MATT: Someday. What happens in the meantime?

STEVE: It's great to get practice, but does it have to come when we're tied with five minutes to go?

TONY: Hey! He said he was sorry about the game.

RICKY: I need practice under pressure, too. So do the other subs. We have to know how it feels.

MATT: Well, I'd like to know how it feels to win a game.

TONY: We've won some games. Six wins, four losses.

STEVE: It could have been eight wins and two losses.

MATT: My dad is really going to chew me out tonight.

RICKY: For what? You played a great game.

MATT: Most of the time. But I missed both of those long shots, the three-pointers. If I'd made either one of them, we would have won.

TONY: You aren't the only person who missed a shot.

RICKY: That's for sure.

MATT: I guess you'll really get yelled at when you get home.

RICKY: No. If I do something good, my folks tell me it was great. If I play lousy, like today, they just say it was fun to come and watch the game.

TONY: That's how my mom is, too. She says as long as I play clean, she's proud of me.

RICKY: Well, I have to get going. My grandparents are taking the whole family out for pizza. See you at practice tomorrow. *(RICKY exits.)*

MATT: Unfortunately.

THE SIMPLE LIFE

CAST: Three players: EMMA, KATE, SHELLY.

SETTING: A table and three chairs in school cafeteria.

AT RISE: EMMA, KATE and SHELLY enter, carrying lunch trays, and sit at a table, facing audience. SHELLY has a can of pop; KATE has a carton of milk; EMMA has a glass of water. Other food optional. EMMA opens her tote bag and removes a cloth napkin.

EMMA: Thanks for asking me to eat lunch with you. I was really nervous about my first day at this school.

KATE: I moved last year, so I know what it feels like.

SHELLY: Did either of you watch the special on Channel 4 last night—"The Feast of the Eyeball Eaters?"

KATE: I saw the first half, but my mom said it was too violent and made me turn it off. I watched a rerun instead.

SHELLY: Oh, too bad. The end was the best part. I could hardly stand to look at it. Did you see it, Emma?

EMMA: No.

SHELLY: *(To EMMA)* **You didn't get anything to drink.**

EMMA: I have water.

SHELLY: You can get Coke or Pepsi from the machine, if you don't want milk.

EMMA: No, thanks. I don't drink pop.

KATE: Never? *(EMMA shakes her head no.)*

SHELLY: Why not? Are you allergic?

EMMA: My family tries to live as simply as possible. We don't buy anything unless we need it.

KATE: Did your parents lose their jobs? Is that why you moved?

EMMA: Oh, no. They both work. We moved so they would be closer to their jobs. My dad rides his bike to work now.

SHELLY: I don't get it. If your parents both work, why can't you afford to buy pop?

EMMA: It isn't that I can't afford to. It's that I choose not to.

My family decided a couple of years ago that we would try not to waste any of the earth's resources. We had to make a lot of changes, and at first I didn't like all of them but now I do.

SHELLY: Changes like not drinking pop?

EMMA: Right. Water is cheaper, better for my health, and it doesn't waste energy.

SHELLY: *(Defensively)* I recycle my pop cans.

EMMA: I'm not criticizing you. I'm just explaining my way.

KATE: What else did you give up, besides soft drinks?

EMMA: The main things were appliances, like the dishwasher and the clothes dryer. I don't use a hair dryer anymore, either, or a curling iron. That's why I keep my hair short.

SHELLY: It's cute that way.

EMMA: Thanks. It's easy.

KATE: It takes me half an hour every morning to dry and curl my hair.

SHELLY: It sounds like your family wants to live in the past, before people had labor-saving machines.

EMMA: The machines that save labor use electrical energy. We prefer to use people power. And when appliances like dryers wear out, they usually end up in land fills.

KATE: You said your dad rides a bike to work. Don't you have a car, either?

EMMA: We have a car, but we don't use it much. My mom takes the bus to work.

SHELLY: What kind of work do they do?

EMMA: Mom's a physical therapist; Dad's an engineer. But they both work only part time. We don't need as much money, now that we live simply, and they wanted time for other things. They have a big garden and lots of hobbies.

SHELLY: My folks both work full time, and we still never have any extra money.

KATE: Neither do we.

EMMA: We used to be that way, too. But you'd be surprised how much money you don't spend when you cut out things that aren't essential.

SHELLY: Don't you ever do anything fun?

EMMA: All the time. We go camping, and we work in a community theatre group. Next week we start rehearsals for "Dracula, Darling." I'm going to help with props.

KATE: I'd like that.

EMMA: It's fun. Mom has a part this time, but sometimes she works backstage, too. Dad's usually the stage manager.

SHELLY: I suppose you watch TV a lot. That's cheap.

EMMA: We don't have a TV.

SHELLY: Do you belong to some weird religion?

KATE: Shelly! That's rude.

EMMA: I know it seems strange when you first think about it. Living a simple life means not having a lot of things that other people take for granted, like TV and personal computers and VCRs.

SHELLY: It sounds awful.

EMMA: That's what I thought, at first. But now that we've done it awhile, I like the simple way better.

SHELLY: I'd hate it if I could never watch TV. I'd be bored out of my mind. Like last night. There was absolutely nothing to do except watch "The Feast of the Eyeball Eaters."

KATE: *(To Emma)* What did you do last night?

EMMA: I finished carving a wooden duck for my grandpa's birthday present. I made it from some driftwood that I found when we went clamming. And then I wrote a letter to my pen pal in Japan and then Dad and I made popcorn and played gin rummy.

KATE: It sounds a lot more interesting than the stupid rerun I watched. Tonight I'm going to see if my dad wants to play cards with me. Maybe my brother will play, too.

SHELLY: Not me. Tonight is the sequel: "Son of the Eyeball Eaters." I can hardly wait. *(They stand and pick up lunch trays. EMMA folds her cloth napkin and puts it back in her tote* *bag.)* Didn't you think the school would have napkins?

EMMA: I don't use paper products. It's easy to carry my own cloth napkin. I use a cloth handkerchief, too, and I have a water cup for times when there's nothing but paper or Styrofoam cups.

SHELLY: What about toilet paper? Do you carry a rag with you?

KATE: Shelly! *(EMMA laughs.)*

SHELLY: Well, she said she doesn't use paper products.

EMMA: I use the necessary ones.

SHELLY: That's a relief.

KATE: We'd better go. It's almost time for class to start.

SHELLY: I'll meet you after school. You still want to go to the mall, don't you, to shop for earrings?

KATE: Yes. *(She looks at EMMA.)* Do you want to come with us?

EMMA: No, thanks.

SHELLY: I suppose you don't believe in shopping at malls.

EMMA: There's nothing wrong with malls, but I buy most of my clothes at consignment shops or rummage sales.

KATE: *(Nodding in understanding)* We need warm clothes, not designer jeans.

EMMA: I'd go with you, except I promised my neighbor I'd babysit while she goes to the doctor. See you later. *(She exits.)*

SHELLY: What a weird way to live. I wonder if she buys second-hand underwear.

KATE: I wonder how many trees are used every day to make paper napkins and paper cups.

SHELLY: See you after school.

KATE: Maybe I'll just window shop this afternoon. I don't really need new earrings.

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NO EASY ANSWERS

CAST: Seven players: LEADER, PATTY, KEVIN, BOB, BONNIE, ROGER, JILL.

AT RISE: LEADER, PATTY, KEVIN and BOB sit together on right side of the playing area. There is one empty chair on the left side.

LEADER: Welcome to the first meeting of Problem Solvers. Three people will be sharing a problem with us. We have promised not to discuss what they tell us with anyone outside this group. Our task is to listen and to suggest ways for them to help themselves. They ask you to be completely honest and open in your remarks. In return, they have agreed to accept at least one of your suggestions. *(LEADER calls Off-stage.)* **First problem, please.** *(BONNIE enters and sits in the empty chair.)*

BONNIE: I never eat lunch at school. My parents don't know this; they would have a fit if I told them. They give me money every week to buy lunch in the cafeteria, but I never do. The food isn't bad. It isn't the greatest, but they have tacos and spaghetti, and there's always fruit and salad. I could choke it down without any trouble. In fact, some days, I'm so hungry and it smells so good that I can hardly stand not to buy a lunch, but then I remember. No one ever sits with me. I never eat lunch at school because it is too awful to sit in the cafeteria alone. Not that I blame anyone. Who would want to sit with a fat slob like me?

LEADER: Why doesn't anyone sit with Bonnie?

KEVIN: Because she never talks.

BOB: Her whole family is strange. Her brother's a real wacko.

PATTY: I thought she didn't eat lunch because she's fat and was trying to diet.

LEADER: How does she get fat if she never eats lunch?

BONNIE: By the time I get home from school, I'm famished.

I eat everything in sight. My mom is constantly trying to get me to go on a diet. She was fat, too, until last year. Then she had to have an operation, and while she was in the hospital, she had a tummy tuck. Mom loves to cook. She makes fantastic brownies and spaghetti. She even makes cinnamon rolls, and this great dessert called pecan fudge torte. I drool just thinking about it. I asked her how she expected me to diet when I'm living in the temptation capital of the world. She says she cooks for my dad and my brother; they don't have a weight problem.

BOB: Man, that's unfair. Who could diet when someone else is chowing down goodies in front of them all the time?

PATTY: Her mom is being mean.

LEADER: What can Bonnie do to help herself?

KEVIN: Eat lunch. If she ate lunch, she wouldn't be so hungry when she got home, and she wouldn't pig out on her mom's pecan fudge torte.

PATTY: But she's embarrassed to sit by herself every day.

BOB: She could look for someone else who's sitting alone and ask them if she could sit with them.

KEVIN: She could bring her lunch from home and ask one of the teachers if she could eat in the classroom.

LEADER: Bonnie thinks her problem is that no one sits with her in the cafeteria. What do you think Bonnie's problem is?

PATTY: She's fat, and she's self-conscious about it.

KEVIN: Lack of friends.

BOB: Her mother. No, it's her whole family. I'd be weird, too, if I had to live with her brother.

LEADER: She can't change her family. What can she change?

PATTY: Her weight. Nobody controls what Bonnie puts in her mouth except Bonnie. If she is really determined to lose the extra weight, she could do it.

BOB: She could go to the gym during lunch hour and work out. That would help her lose weight.

KEVIN: Yes. She could run every day or do some other aerobic-type exercise.

PATTY: She could use her lunch money to buy fresh fruit to eat instead of her mother's fattening desserts.

BOB: If she got her weight under control, she'd feel more positive about herself, and it might not be so hard for her to make friends.

KEVIN: She could also find something else to do after school every day, so she isn't tempted to eat.

BOB: Good idea. She should join a club or get a part-time job. She might make a friend.

PATTY: She could get a paper route and either walk or ride a bike to deliver the papers. That would give her something to do and a way to exercise at the same time.

LEADER: So, your advice to Bonnie is:

KEVIN: Take control of what you eat.

PATTY: Keep busy after school.

BOB: Get more exercise.

LEADER: *(Calls Off-stage)* Second problem, please. *(BONNIE exits. ROGER enters.)*

ROGER: My problem is my older brother. Brendan is the perfect person. Every parent's dream child. He's good looking; he never gets in trouble; he's a straight-A student; he's president of the debate team and he already has a basketball scholarship to an Ivy League college. The trouble is, everyone expects me to be just like Brendan. But I'm not. I'm no delinquent or anything, but I am not Mr. Teen America, either. If I get mostly Bs on my report card, my parents don't complain, but I can tell they're disappointed. And I'm a total klutz on the basketball court. I feel like no matter what I do, I'll never be as good as Brendan, so why try?

LEADER: What is Roger's problem?

BOB: It isn't his brother. His brother isn't doing anything wrong.

PATTY: Roger's problem is himself. It's how he feels about his brother.

KEVIN: That's right. I think Roger's envious of his brother.

LEADER: What can Roger do about his problem?

PATTY: Develop his own strengths. There must be something that he's better at than his brother.

KEVIN: He should quit comparing himself to Brendan. He's unhappy because he says everyone else compares him to his brother, but he does the same thing himself.

BOB: He needs to let go of the jealousy.

PATTY: Roger should choose something he's interested in and then work at getting really good at it. Music lessons, maybe. Or acting. Anything that's exciting to him.

BOB: Something that Brendan doesn't do.

KEVIN: He needs to stay busy. It's a cop-out to say he shouldn't bother to try because he can't compete with his brother. If he's active and busy, he won't have so much time to mope around and feel inadequate.

PATTY: He could try helping someone who's less fortunate. Get involved with a charity or visit the little kids at Children's Hospital. His own problem won't seem so bad when he's around some kid who has leukemia.

LEADER: So, your advice to Roger is:

KEVIN: Quit comparing yourself to your brother.

BOB: Develop a skill all your own.

PATTY: Find someone who needs your help.

LEADER: *(Calls Off-stage)* Problem three, please. *(ROGER exits. JILL enters.)*

JILL: I really don't know why I agreed to do this. The whole thing is a waste of time.

LEADER: State your problem, please.

JILL: Which one?

LEADER: Whichever one you want help with.

JILL: If my problems could be fixed, I wouldn't be here. This committee is a dumb idea, just like everything else that goes on in this so-called institution of learning.

LEADER: If you don't want to state a problem, perhaps you could tell us what you dislike about school.

JILL: Can you stay for a few weeks? Because that's how long it would take.

LEADER: Go ahead and begin. I'll tell you when your time is up.

JILL: Well, for starters, the teachers are all prejudiced against anybody who doesn't happen to have a parent on the school board. And the stuff they teach us is so unreal. Do you know what we're doing in social studies this month? We're learning about all the religions of the world. Talk about a waste of time. I don't go to church so what possible reason is there for me to know about Buddha and Confucius? And my P.E. teacher keeps talking about "personal goals." She says everyone should set personal goals and then compete only with themselves. Well, the only personal goal I have is to quit school and leave home and get away from this backwards town.

LEADER: Thank you. Your time is up. *(JILL sits. During the following discussion she makes a point of looking bored. She reacts to the suggestions by rolling her eyes, shaking her head, etc., to convey how pointless she thinks they are.)* What do you think Jill's problem is?

PATTY: This one's easy. Her problem is her attitude.

KEVIN: But why? Why is she so negative? Is that the real problem or just a symptom of something else?

BOB: Her attitude is causing her a lot of grief, so whether it's the basic problem or not, we should try to help her change it.

LEADER: How? What do you think Jill can do to help herself?

PATTY: Quit complaining. Try to see something positive for a change.

KEVIN: She can choose to be happy. Maybe that's what her personal goal ought to be—choosing happiness.

BOB: She could pretend to like school. Sometimes if you pretend to like something, pretty soon you really do like it.

PATTY: I never thought of that. Maybe I could pretend to like my little sister.

BOB: Maybe Jill could make up a plan for herself. If she is serious about wanting to get away from this town, she needs to figure out a realistic way to do it. It's no help to say she's going to quit school and run away. She needs to know how she can support herself.

PATTY: School can be a means to an end. Get her diploma because it will allow her more options.

BOB: Exactly. If she graduates, it will be easier to find a job in a different town.

LEADER: What advice do you have for Jill? Three specific things?

PATTY: Vow not to complain about anything.

KEVIN: Pretend to like school.

BOB: Make a two-year plan. Figure out some ways to get the life she wants.

LEADER: Will the first two people with problems please come back? *(BONNIE and ROGER return. JILL stands. These three face the others.)* You have heard suggested solutions to your problems. Each of you agreed to choose at least one of these suggestions and try it. What is your choice?

BONNIE: It makes sense for me to exercise after school instead of eating. I'll do that.

ROGER: I've always thought it would be fun to be a clown, but I never had the nerve to try it. I'm going to learn how and then take my clown act to visit Children's Hospital. *(All look at JILL. She stands defensively, arms crossed.)*

LEADER: Jill? Which suggestion do you accept?

JILL: You guys are weird, do you know that? Sitting around like a bunch of amateur psychiatrists, picking apart other people's problems. It's sick.

LEADER: You agreed to try at least one piece of advice. Which one do you choose?

JILL: Nobody can make me do this. Once I leave this room, you can't control what I do.

LEADER: Are you saying you want to back out of your promise?

JILL: I'm saying your so-called suggestions are no good.

PATTY: How do you know until you try them?

JILL: Oh, sure. It's easy for you, isn't it? You who never had a problem in your entire life can sit there and tell me to change my attitude.

LEADER: Each of the people on this committee was chosen because they have successfully overcome a serious problem of their own.

JILL: Oh, yeah? Like deciding what to wear to the dance? You think there are easy answers to what's wrong in my life. Well, you don't know what you're talking about. Just because everything's rosy in your life, you think it can be that way for me, too. All I have to do is smile and pretend to be happy.

KEVIN: There have been some thorns in our roses, too.

LEADER: Jill, we aren't here to discuss their problems. We want to know how you plan to help yourself solve your problem.

PATTY: I don't mind telling her about my problem. Maybe it will help. *(She stands and walks over to JILL.)* Two years ago, my sister committed suicide. I found her when I went home from school.

BOB: *(He stands and approaches JILL, too.)* My parents are alcoholics. They've been in and out of more treatment programs than I can count. And I've been in and out of foster homes since I was three years old.

KEVIN: *(Stands, too.)* I have defective kidneys. I've been on dialysis for over a year. I'm hoping eventually to have a kidney transplant, if a suitable donor can be found.

BONNIE: Wow! I didn't know all this.

LEADER: Thank you all for being so open. Jill, we are waiting for your answer.

JILL: All right. So maybe I was wrong about you guys having problems. But that doesn't change anything for me. I still say school's a waste of time and this town is out of the last century.

LEADER: Our time is up. Bonnie, Roger, and Jill, you may leave.

JILL: Finally. *(She exits.)*

ROGER: Thanks for listening. I learned something about myself.

BONNIE: Me, too. And I'm going to try really hard to lose some weight. *(ROGER and BONNIE exit.)*

PATTY: Two out of three. I guess that isn't too bad.

KEVIN: I hope Jill doesn't run away. *(All start to exit.)*

BOB: I wonder what else we could have said to her.

LEADER: You did your best. Nobody can help Jill if she isn't willing to help herself.

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JUST A JOB

CAST: Three players, either sex: PERSON ONE, TWO and THREE.

*(Directions: Speak the lines rapidly, in sing-song fashion: da-da-*dum*, da-da-*dum*, da-da-*da*-da-da-da-*dum*, with no break in the rhythm between speakers. Optional: Snap fingers on the accented syllables.)*

PERSON ONE: Just a job, just a job. All I need is just a job. Any job, any job. I'll work hard for extra cash.

PERSON TWO: Just a job, just a job. This girl really needs a job.

PERSON ONE: I'd work hard, I'd work hard, if I only had a job.

PERSON TWO: Just a job, just a job. This girl really needs a job.

PERSON ONE: I'll be prompt, every day, and I'll never phone in sick.

PERSON TWO: She'll work hard, she'll work hard. This girl really needs a job.

PERSON THREE: Can you type? Can you file? Have you any special skill?

PERSON ONE: I am smart; I am strong. I can work on Saturday.

PERSON TWO: Try her out, tell her yes. Take a chance on someone young.

PERSON THREE: Can you cook? Can you add? Can you make the proper change?

PERSON: ONE: All my friends will be green. They'll wish they had found a job.

PERSON TWO: Sign her up, take her on. Give this girl a chance to work.

PERSON THREE: Any training? Any skills? Have you ever worked before?

PERSON ONE: Just a job, any job. I'll work hard to earn some cash.

PERSON TWO: She'll work hard, she'll work hard. Won't you give this girl a job?

PERSON THREE: Can you saw? Drive a nail? Check the oil in a car?

PERSON ONE: I can learn, I'll work hard. And I'll never, ever quit.

PERSON TWO: Just a job, just a job. Won't you give this girl a job?

PERSON THREE: Are you sure? Do you know? Do you know how hard it is?

PERSON ONE: Need the cash, need the cash. Need a job to buy a car.

PERSON TWO: Just a job, just a job. Won't you give this girl a job?

PERSON THREE: Every day, every day. You must show up every day.

PERSON ONE: I'll be there, without fail. I'll do anything you say.

PERSON TWO: She'll work hard. She'll stay late. She'll do anything you say.

PERSON THREE: No diploma and no skills. No experience on a job.

PERSON ONE: Something fun, something wild. Nothing boring, nothing hard.

PERSON TWO: Just a job, just a job. All she wants is just a job.

PERSON THREE: After school, every day. It will take up all your time.

PERSON ONE: Want a job, want a job. Something daring, something bold.

PERSON TWO: Just a job, just a job. This girl really needs a job.

PERSON ONE: Pay my bills, pay my bills. Need the cash to pay my bills.

PERSON TWO: Need a job, any job. Can you give this girl a chance?

PERSON THREE: There's one job you could do. Fry some burgers, make some shakes.

PERSON TWO: Do you hear? This is great! You are going to get a job!

PERSON ONE: Frying burgers? Making shakes? Not exactly what I want.

PERSON THREE: It's a job, it's a job. It's a way to get a start.

PERSON ONE: Lousy pay, no prestige. I'll hold out for something else.

PERSON TWO: This girl's smart. She is bright. She deserves a better job.

PERSON ONE: Want a job, want a job. Something worthy of my time.

PERSON TWO: Of her time, of her time. Something worthy of her time.

PERSON ONE: Buy a car, learn to ski. Get a TV of my own.

PERSON TWO: Just a job, just a job. All she wants is just a job.

PERSON ONE: Something different, something grand. Nothing ordinary, please.

PERSON TWO: Just a job, just a job. Something worthy of her time.

PERSON ONE: Nothing boring, nothing hard. But I really want a job.

PERSON TWO: Just a job, just a job. All she wants is just a job.

PERSON ONE: With good pay, lots of pay. I deserve a lot of pay.

PERSON TWO: Something fun, something wild. Nothing boring, nothing hard.

PERSON ONE: Just a job, just a job. All I want is just a job.

PERSON THREE: No diploma, no degree. She has never had a job.

PERSON ONE: Lots of pay, lots of pay. I deserve a lot of pay.

PERSON TWO: Just a job, just a job. All she wants is just a job.

PERSON THREE: Sorry, kid. No experience. I don't have a job for you.

PERSON TWO: No experience, no experience. All they say is, "No experience."

PERSON ONE: Earn some cash, buy a car. Get some jingle in my jeans.

PERSON TWO: She'd work hard, be on time. She deserves to have a job.

PERSON THREE: Someone else has applied. I will give that man a job.

PERSON ONE: Is he smart? Is he strong? Does he really need the cash?

PERSON THREE: I don't know; I don't care. He'll fry burgers; he'll make shakes.

PERSON TWO: There's no chance. You're too young. He won't listen to a kid.

PERSON ONE: It's not fair. I'd work hard, if I only had a job.

PERSON TWO: Something fun, something wild. Nothing boring, nothing hard.

PERSON ONE: *(More slowly)* Just a job, just a job. All I want is just a job.

ONE AND TWO TOGETHER: Just a job, just a job. It's so hard to find a job.

49

A BABY OF MY OWN

CAST: Three players: BETTY, JILL, ROBYN.

PROPS: Doll wrapped in blanket. Gift-wrapped package containing something for a baby. Rocking chair, if possible. BETTY wears a bathrobe. JILL and ROBYN wear casual clothes.

SETTING: BETTY's living room. Playlet can be done with three plain chairs (or two chairs plus the rocker) for the set.

AT RISE: BETTY is On Stage, Left, holding the doll. If rocking chair is used, she is rocking her baby.

(JILL and ROBYN enter, Right, and walk slowly toward BETTY. ROBYN carries the gift.)

JILL: I can't wait to see him.

ROBYN: I've never seen a newborn baby before.

JILL: It's hard to imagine Betty as a mother. She is so lucky.

ROBYN: I don't know how lucky it is to have a baby when you're sixteen years old and not married. I have a feeling Betty wishes she'd been more careful.

JILL: I'd love to have a little baby of my own.

ROBYN: You would?

JILL: A sweet, little, cuddly baby that was all mine; someone who would love me better than anyone in the whole world. Wouldn't you like that?

ROBYN: Some day I'd like a baby, but not yet. *(They stop a short distance from BETTY.)*

JILL: We came to see your baby.

ROBYN: And you. *(JILL and ROBYN stand next to BETTY to admire baby.)*

JILL: Oh, isn't he sweet?

ROBYN: He's so little.

BETTY: Seven pounds, three ounces. He's gained back what he lost after he was born.

JILL: He's adorable. He's the cutest thing I've ever seen.

BETTY: Do you want to hold him?

JILL: Oh, yes. *(BETTY carefully transfers doll to JILL. JILL and ROBYN sit in other two chairs.)*

ROBYN: We brought you a little gift for Matthew. *(She hands the package to BETTY.)*

BETTY: Thanks. That's really nice of you. *(She opens package and removes gift.)*

JILL: We had a blast shopping for it. I never saw so many darling little outfits.

BETTY: This is really nice. Thank you.

ROBYN: I hope it's something you need. We weren't sure what you had.

BETTY: You couldn't guess wrong. I need everything.

JILL: I wanted to get some little high-top tennis shoes, but Robyn talked me into being more practical.

ROBYN: How are you feeling?

BETTY: Tired. Matthew eats every three hours, so I don't get much sleep.

JILL: Look at his tiny, little fingers.

ROBYN: Will you be coming back to school?

BETTY: Not this year. I want to but I have to find a job, and right now I don't have anyone to watch Matthew.

ROBYN: What about your Mom?

BETTY: She works three days a week. Even if she didn't, I couldn't leave Matthew with her all the time.

JILL: Why not? Most grandmothers love to babysit.

ROBYN: Not every day.

BETTY: Mom loves Matthew, but she says she raised her kids and I can raise mine.

JILL: Well, if I had a baby, I'd rather stay home and take care of him than go to school.

BETTY: Next year I hope I can go to school in the morning, be with Matthew in the afternoon and evening, and then work a night shift. He could be in daycare in the morning, and Mom would babysit at night, when he'd be asleep the whole time.

ROBYN: When would you sleep?

BETTY: Good question. *(JILL makes cooing noises and nuzzles the doll.)*

ROBYN: Has Ben seen him?

BETTY: Once. He came to the hospital when Matthew was born. He feels so guilty that I'm trapped at home and he's still in school. His parents paid part of the hospital bill.

JILL: We thought you and Ben might get married.

BETTY: Neither of us wanted that. We aren't ready to get married.

JILL: I am. All I need is a husband.

BETTY: Ben had to drop basketball.

JILL: He can't! He's the best center we have.

BETTY: He works after school now. He had to get a part-time job, to help with Matthew's expenses.

ROBYN: I'm glad he's taking some responsibility.

JILL: Glad! How can you be glad? This means we probably won't have a chance to go to the district playoffs this year. Remember how much fun we had last year? Remember the pep rally where the three of us did that silly skit?

ROBYN: We laughed so hard we couldn't even finish our act.

BETTY: That seems a hundred years ago, like a different lifetime.

ROBYN: We'd better be going. *(She stands. JILL gives baby back to BETTY.)*

BETTY: It was great to see you. And thanks for the present.

JILL: The whole gang is going out for pizza tomorrow night. Why don't you come with us? You could bring Matthew along, if you don't have anyone to watch him.

BETTY: *(Shakes her head no.)* I'm not ready for that. I can't fit into any of my clothes. Thanks, anyway. And thanks for coming over.

ROBYN: Good-by. *(JILL and ROBYN walk away. BETTY rocks baby.)*

JILL: Did you ever see anything so adorable? Betty is so lucky.

ROBYN: I wouldn't trade places with her.

JILL: Well, I would. It would be wonderful to have a tiny, little baby to love and take care of. A sweet, little baby, all my own.

50

THE INHERITANCE

CAST: Five players, two male, three female: SHARON, AMY, MARK, ERIK, MS. BISHOP.

SETTING: Scene is waiting room at attorney's office.

(SHARON and AMY are On Stage at start.)

SHARON: I can hardly wait to find out what Grandma left us. For all we know, we might be rich.

AMY: I doubt that. She probably left her house and her money to Dad and Uncle Jack. We'll probably each get something personal, like a piece of jewelry.

SHARON: I hope I get her diamond earrings. Or is that what you were hoping for?

AMY: *(Shakes her head)* I'm hoping I might get Freddy the Teddy.

SHARON: That scruffy old teddy bear?

AMY: It was Grandma's when she was little. It's the only toy that she had when she was small.

SHARON: All the fur is rubbed off, and he's missing an eye.

AMY: I don't care. Grandma loved Freddy the Teddy. Ever since I can remember, he sat on her bed, right on the pillow. She used to let me sleep with him when I was sick.

SHARON: I wonder why she never got a new eye for him.

AMY: I asked her that once. She said it's expensive to have a quality restoration done on an antique toy, and she didn't want to spend the money.

SHARON: I don't blame her. Well, you can have the bear; I'd rather have something useful. And valuable. *(Enter MARK and ERIK)*

MARK: Hi, cousins. Ready for the big reading of the will?

ERIK: If Grandma left me a bundle of money, I know exactly what I'm going to spend it on. It's red, and it has four wheels and a convertible top, and it drives like a dream.

SHARON: Well, I hope you didn't sign any papers yet. Maybe all you'll get is a set of dishes.

MARK: Grandma wouldn't do that to us.

AMY: I think we should quit talking about what we hope she left us. It sounds greedy.

ERIK: What do most people talk about while they're waiting to hear the terms of someone's will?

MARK: *(Points Off Stage)* What's going on in there? We thought we were late.

SHARON: The attorney is still talking to our dad and yours. When she's through with them, she'll come out and talk to us.

ERIK: I could hardly sleep last night. I kept thinking about that little red car with the big engine. *(MS. BISHOP enters, carrying briefcase or file folder. All stand.)*

BISHOP: Good afternoon. I'm Alison Bishop, your grandmother's attorney.

SHARON: I'm Sharon Hamilton. This is my sister, Amy, and my cousins, Mark and Erik. *(All shake hands.)*

BISHOP: Please sit down. *(They do.)* This won't take long. Your grandmother left most of her estate to her two sons, your fathers, to be evenly divided between them. She also left the following to her grandchildren: *(She reads from will.)* To Mark: The pocket watch that belonged to her husband.

MARK: Oh! Grandpa's watch. I'd forgotten about that. He taught me to tell time on it.

BISHOP: To Sharon: Her diamond earrings. *(SHARON grins broadly, looks at AMY and nods.)* To Erik: Her collection of bird books.

ERIK: No kidding. The bird books! She and I used to watch the birds at the bird feeder, and we made a little X in the books whenever we identified one.

BISHOP: To Amy: Freddy the Teddy. *(AMY bursts into tears.)*

MARK: Maybe you can sell him. Some of those old toys are worth money.

SHARON: That isn't why she's crying. She wanted the bear.

ERIK: She did? Why?

MARK: Even though it isn't a bundle of cash, I'm glad I got Grandpa's watch.

BISHOP: There's something more. Your grandmother loved to keep in touch with all of you. For the last six years, whenever one of you called her on the phone, or stopped to visit, she put ten dollars in a special savings account in your name. She even put ten dollars in if you wrote a thank-you letter when she gave you a gift.

MARK: I always wrote "thanks" on the back of the check when I signed it. I hope she saw that.

BISHOP: There were four accounts, one for each of you, and instructions for distributing the money. She kept careful records and she said to tell you this is her way of thanking you for letting her share your lives. *(She hands each of them a check. AMY stares at hers during next five speeches.)*

SHARON: Mine's for two hundred, fifty-two dollars and four cents. What's yours?

MARK: Ninty-nine dollars and thirty-two cents. I guess she didn't look at the back of her cancelled checks.

ERIK: Mine's almost five hundred dollars! Four-eighty-nine and thirteen cents. I didn't realize I called Grandma that often.

BISHOP: That includes interest.

MARK: What about yours, Amy? I hope you got something besides that worn-out, old bear.

SHARON: You were always calling Grandma and going over there. *(AMY nods yes.)* Well, how much did you get? *(AMY is still emotional and can't talk. She hands her check to SHARON.)* Wow!

ERIK: How much?

SHARON: Fifteen thousand, six hundred eighty-three dollars and two cents.

ERIK: Fifteen thousand dollars?

MARK: It was pretty sneaky of Grandma not to tell us she was doing this.

BISHOP: It wouldn't have been the same if you had known. She would have thought you called her because of the money.

AMY: I called Grandma and went over because I loved her. I didn't expect anything like this.

ERIK: I don't suppose you'd like to buy a sweet, little, red car and lend it to your favorite cousin?

AMY: Sorry.

ERIK: I didn't think so.

SHARON: Practical Amy will save it all for college. Right?

AMY: Most of it, but not all. I'm going to spend some right away.

MARK: Shopping mall, here she comes.

AMY: Not the mall. The phone book. I need to find someone who does restoration work on antique toys. Freddy the Teddy is going to have a new glass eye.

SHARON: It's about time.

AMY: And then he'll have a special place on my bed. Right on the pillow.

51

SOMEBODY SHOULD DO SOMETHING

CAST: Four players: RITA, TIM, KAY, NICKY.

(RITA is On Stage at start. TIM enters.)

RITA: Hi, Tim. Where are you going?

TIM: To the school office. This is the last day to sign up for litter duty.

RITA: The parking lot and school yard sure look better since that litter program started. There used to be paper blowing all over the place. Somebody should have done something about it years ago.

TIM: It's making people more careful, too. The first time I worked on litter pickup, we filled twenty bags with trash. Last time, we only filled four bags, and we did the whole neighborhood, not just the school.

RITA: How often does somebody do the litter pickup?

TIM: One Saturday morning every month. Haven't you had a turn? I thought everyone was working once each quarter.

RITA: I—uh, haven't had a chance to sign up yet.

TIM: Come and sign up with me now. Maybe we could work the same shift.

RITA: My schedule is pretty busy.

TIM: So is mine. *(RITA exits. KAY enters.)* Hi Kay. What's the matter? You look upset.

KAY: I am upset. I just saw a little kid almost get hit trying to cross the street. He was in the crosswalk, too, but the car didn't even slow down. Somebody should do something about the traffic outside the school. We need a traffic light.

TIM: Maybe we could have everyone sign a petition and give it to the city council. Maybe they don't know how bad the situation is.

KAY: The city council won't pay any attention to a bunch of teenagers. Besides, traffic lights cost a fortune.

TIM: Maybe we could organize crossing guards, with flags. Lots of kids from the elementary school walk by here every day. If we older kids took turns being the guards, it wouldn't cost the school anything except the money to buy the red flags.

KAY: That's a good idea. Somebody should do that.

TIM: I could come early one day every week, to help. I bet lots of kids would be willing to do it. Let's ask the principal to meet with us and see if we can get it started.

KAY: I can't come early because my dad drops me off every day on his way to work.

TIM: Oh. Well, what about after school? We would need crossing guards then, too.

KAY: My mom picks me up on her way home. In fact, there she is now. See you later. *(KAY exits. NICKY enters.)*

NICKY: Have you heard about the Blast Mr. Ryan party?

TIM: You mean someone's having a retirement party for Mr. Ryan?

NICKY: Not exactly. It's a celebration party because he's retiring, but he won't be invited. Everyone's going to bring food and tell why they're glad they'll never have Mr. Ryan for English again. They're going to write all the comments in a notebook and leave it on Mr. Ryan's desk.

TIM: That's mean. I like Mr. Ryan.

NICKY: Me, too. I thought he was a pretty good teacher. But you know how ideas like that can get out of hand.

TIM: Who started it?

NICKY: I don't know. Shelly told me about it, and she said Matthew told her.

TIM: Are they going to go?

NICKY: I guess so.

TIM: Well, I'm not.

NICKY: Good. Then I won't go, either.

TIM: I think we should tell Mr. Ryan what's going on.

NICKY: Are you nuts? Why should we get blamed when we didn't have anything to do with it?

TIM: If we told him, he wouldn't blame us, and he might be able to put a stop to it.

NICKY: You can tell him if you want to, but I'm not having anything to do with it. He'll be furious.

TIM: Think how badly his feelings will be hurt if the party takes place. He's taught here for a long time. His last week shouldn't be spoiled by a mean trick like that. It isn't right.

NICKY: I told Shelly that. I said somebody should put a stop to it.

TIM: I'm going to tell one of the other teachers. Right now. They'll know what to do. Maybe they can step in and prevent the whole thing from happening. Maybe Mr. Ryan won't ever have to know anything about it.

NICKY: Why are you sticking your neck out? You never even had Mr. Ryan, did you?

TIM: No. But the Blast Mr. Ryan party is wrong, and somebody ought to stop it.

NICKY: I agree, but . . .

TIM: I am somebody. *(TIM exits one direction. NICKY shrugs and exits the other direction.)*

TRANSFORMATION

CAST: Three female students, two male students: LISA, JANE, WENDY, ROY, BARRY. TEACHER, either sex.

SETTING: Set is bare except for five plain chairs in semi-circle, facing the audience.

(LISA and JANE enter, talking as they enter.)

LISA: Are you ready for this?

JANE: I guess so.

LISA: You were smart to choose dog. That's an easy one. I decided to be an elephant. My dad had to drive me to the library last night. *(ROY enters. LISA and JANE sit in two center chairs.)*

ROY: Hi.

LISA: Hi, Roy. Did you choose an animal?

ROY: Can you believe this? I've heard of some weird assignments, but I've never been told to think like a pig before. *(ROY sits next to LISA.)*

JANE: You're going to be a pig? Oh, that's great. Did you practice oinking?

ROY: No, I practiced eating.

LISA: At least this class is never boring. *(WENDY enters. Others ignore her. She hesitates, as if wondering where to sit. BARRY enters. He comes up behind WENDY.)*

BARRY: Out of my way, stupid.

WENDY: Sorry. *(She moves aside. BARRY moves, too, and stays directly behind her.)*

BARRY: I said, get out of my way. *(He punches her lightly—not hard enough to hurt, but she jumps nervously.)*

LISA: Leave her alone, Barry.

BARRY: *(Mimicking)* **Leave her alone, Barry. Poor little thing can't defend herself.** *(WENDY sidles to closest chair, on end of semicircle, and sits down. BARRY promptly stands in front of her.)* **Can't you read?**

WENDY: What?

BARRY: Can't you read? That's my chair. There's a sign right on the seat that says so. *(LISA, JANE and ROY snicker.)*

WENDY: I didn't see any sign.

BARRY: Well, you'd better stand up and look again. *(WENDY stands. There is no sign. BARRY sits in the chair. Others laugh.)* Thank you very much. *(WENDY crosses to opposite end chair and sits down. TEACHER enters and stands slightly to side of chairs, where she can face students and audience.)*

TEACHER: Good morning.

ALL EXCEPT WENDY: Good morning.

TEACHER: I trust each of you has given some thought to becoming an animal for today. *(BARRY makes his hands into claws, bares his teeth and growls.)*

LISA: Barry's already an animal.

ROY: That's right. Maybe he'll get a passing grade, for a change.

TEACHER: For a brief time during today's class, each of you will become, in your mind, some other form of life. You will mentally assume that life form and then share that species' feelings about us humans. I hope you gave this assignment some serious thought since yesterday. Who has decided which animal they want to be?

BARRY: I have. I'll be a party animal. *(He moves his arms, as if dancing.)*

TEACHER: As I told you, it's also permissible to be a tree or a bird or a fish.

BARRY: Wendy's a worm. And I'm going fishing.

TEACHER: Has anyone chosen a life form for this project? If not, I will assign the roles.

LISA: I decided to be an elephant.

BARRY: I *told* you if you kept eating so much junk food, you'd get fat, but I didn't think you'd get *that* fat.

TEACHER: Barry, please be quiet until you're called on. Did anyone else select an animal?

JANE: I did. I'm going to be a dog.

ROY: I'm going to be a pig.

BARRY: Me, too. Where's the food? I didn't have any breakfast.

TEACHER: Wendy, did you choose an animal? *(WENDY nods her head yes.)* Did you pick the caterpillar, as I suggested? *(WENDY nods yes.)* Good. Then you are a caterpillar.

BARRY: And I have a big, heavy foot that's going to squash you.

TEACHER: That's enough, Barry. You are a deer.

BARRY: I know I'm a dear. Dear Barry. Dear, sweet Barry.

TEACHER: D-e-e-r.

LISA: As in Bambi.

TEACHER: You will each have one minute to tell how you feel. Tell what makes you happy and what frightens you. Remember always to talk as if you were the animal you've been assigned. As you speak, I may ask a question now and then, to help you think through your feelings. For the purposes of this exercise, I am the voice of the wind. I am unseen, but each of you can hear me, and you understand in your own language.

BARRY: *(Stage whisper)* I always said she was long-winded.

LISA: Shut up, Barry. This sounds like fun, and you're spoiling it.

TEACHER: Everyone else must be silent while each animal speaks. I'm serious about that, Barry. Any comments and you're out of here, as in suspended.

BARRY: OK, OK. Nobody can take a joke.

TEACHER: Lisa, we'll begin with you. Please stand and close your eyes. *(LISA stands, eyes closed.)* You are now an elephant. Please tell us how you feel.

LISA: I'm huge. When I walk through the jungle, I crush plants and bushes under my big feet. It's hot here. It is the dry season, and I am thirsty. I see a young elephant, and I remember how it was to be smaller.

TEACHER: What do you like to do best, elephant?

LISA: I like to be with my family. Twice a year, in the rainy season, my group travels and feeds near other groups, and it is wonderful to see these friends again. We dance and rub against each other. We click our tusks and entwine our trunks. They are just as happy to see me as I am to see them.

TEACHER: And what do you like least about your life?

LISA: The poachers who kill us to get our ivory tusks. It is such a waste of life. Our tusks keep growing throughout our lifetime; if the hunters would allow us to die of old age, they would have far more ivory to sell—many hundred pounds, rather than only ten or twenty. I see the bones of my former friends who did not escape the poachers. Soon, I fear, there will be no friends. There will be no family. There will be no elephants.

TEACHER: Thank you, elephant. You may sit down now. *(LISA sits.)* Next we'll hear from the pig. *(ROY stands.)* Eyes closed, please. *(He does.)* How does it feel to be a pig?

ROY: I like to roll in the mud. There's a big, black mudhole in my pigpen, and I go there when it's hot. It gets the flies off my skin. It's hard to be so fat, though. I can't move fast, and my legs get tired, so I have to rest a lot. But I am intelligent. The other pigs and I are just as smart as dogs. *(Pause)*

TEACHER: You are leaving your pen. You are put on a truck with other pigs and taken to a slaughter house. How do you feel now?

ROY: I'm scared. I can't keep my balance on the truck. All the pigs are squealing and rocking back and forth. I feel sick, and I want to go back to my pen and lie in my mudhole, but I can't. *(His voice rises as he gets into the pig role.)* I can't get out of this damn truck. Let me out!

TEACHER: The truck has stopped now. *(Slight pause)*

ROY: *(Voice lower again, but it rises dramatically during this speech.)*

I'm in a place with the other pigs, but I don't like it. We're crowded. Now some people come. One at a time, they push us along a ramp. They poke me with a stick, to make me move. It smells bad here. I hear other pigs screaming. They are afraid. I am afraid, too. I don't know why I'm here or what is happening. I see the pigs in front of me on the ramp. A man sticks one of them with a long knife. The pig screams. Blood gushes. *(WENDY covers her ears, unable to listen.)* I try to turn back. I can't. I have to go forward. Now the pig in front of me is stuck with the knife. It is my turn next. I see the knife. I can't get away. I scream and struggle. Why? Why?!

TEACHER: Stop there, pig. Open your eyes. *(ROY opens eyes. He appears shaken. LISA and JANE are on the verge of tears.)* Thank you, Roy. You may sit down now. Jane, please stand and tell us how it feels to be a dog.

JANE: Most of the time I like being a dog. It's fun when my owner pets me and plays with me. I like to chase my ball, and I like to roll in the grass and scratch my back. But sometimes I get very hungry, and my owner doesn't come home to feed me on time. And sometimes, when he's angry, he hits me with a newspaper and yells at me, and I don't understand why. All I want is to be a good dog and get food and love.

TEACHER: What is the worst part about your life, dog?

JANE: I hate it when my owner puts a doggie treat on top of my nose and then says "no, no," and won't let me eat it. It smells so good and my stomach grumbles, but he keeps saying "no," and if I take the treat, he spanks me. I don't understand why he gets the treat out if he doesn't want me to have it. He never eats doggie treats, so I know he doesn't want it himself. Just once, I wish he would give one to me as a gift, without making me balance it on my nose first.

TEACHER: Thank you, dog. You may sit down now.

BARRY: Sit. Stay.

TEACHER: *(Warning)* Barry . . . *(BARRY clamps hand over his mouth.)* Since you are so anxious to talk, let's hear what the deer has to say. *(BARRY stands and closes his eyes. He says nothing for a couple of seconds.)* Deer, do you like how you look?

BARRY: Yeah. Yeah. I'm a good-looking buck, with antlers. A big, strong buck.

TEACHER: Can you run fast?

BARRY: I can run fast. And jump. I can jump over fences like they were nothing.

TEACHER: Where do you live?

BARRY: In the forest, with the other deer. We eat the leaves off the trees, I think.

TEACHER: How do you feel during hunting season?

BARRY: Huh?

TEACHER: Pretend it is hunting season. There are hunters in the forest trying to find you and the other deer.

BARRY: I run away when I smell the humans. I can run faster than they can.

TEACHER: No matter which way you run, there are more hunters. You hear shots. *(Pause, waiting for BARRY to speak. He doesn't.)* They shot your friend.

BARRY: I ran away in time.

TEACHER: But they shot your friend. They have powerful guns, and you have nothing. *(No answer)* Do you hear the footsteps of the hunters? They are all through your forest, and none of the deer is safe. *(Pause)* How do you feel now?

BARRY: *(With sudden intensity)* I want to put my head down and ram the hunters with my antlers. I want to stamp on them with my hooves. But they will shoot me if I start to do that. All I can do is run and try to hide, and there is no place to hide.

TEACHER: Thank you. You may open your eyes. *(BARRY does, blinks, looks around as if he isn't sure where he is. He sits* *down.)* Wendy, it is time for you to be a caterpillar.

WENDY: Do I have to?

TEACHER: Just do what the others have done. Tell how it feels to see life from the viewpoint of a caterpillar. *(WENDY rubs hands together nervously, takes a deep breath, closes eyes. Says nothing.)* Begin, please.

WENDY: All the other creatures are bigger than I am. They're faster than I am. I creep carefully along a branch, fearful that a bird will land and eat me. I slink slowly along the sidewalk, expecting to be stomped on at any moment. It's terrible always to be afraid. I am plain and ugly, and I can't do anything clever like the other animals do.

TEACHER: You can build a cocoon. Enclose yourself in a cocoon.

WENDY: *(Hunches over, hugging herself.)* I like it in my cocoon. It is snug and safe here, and none of the others can find me. I curl up tight and see only the inner walls, which look like gossamer with the dim light filtering through. I wish I could stay in this cocoon forever.

TEACHER: Life continues, Wendy. You are now becoming a beautiful butterfly.

WENDY: *(During this speech, WENDY gradually stands tall, shoulders back.)* The cocoon falls away. I stretch and yawn. As I move, I realize I am no longer a caterpillar. In astonishment, I discover that I have wings: lovely, yellow wings with blue and orange markings. I flutter them, experimenting to be sure they work. They do. I leave the empty cocoon behind and fly to the top branch of an apple tree. I move swiftly and surely through the air. No bird will eat me now. I sit on the top of the tree, and I yell, "Hey, world! Look at me! See what's happened? I'm not an ugly caterpillar anymore. I'm a butterfly. A beautiful butterfly!"

TEACHER: Have you changed in any other way, besides your looks?

WENDY: Oh, yes. I am free now. Free of fear. Free of self-doubt. Free of that stifling cocoon that didn't allow me to move. And now that I know how it feels, I won't ever be anything but free again. *(LISA, JANE and ROY spontaneously applaud. WENDY opens her eyes in surprise. She looks at the others, including BARRY. This is the first time in the skit that she has made eye contact with anyone. She continues to stand straight, with confidence.)*

TEACHER: You may sit down, Wendy. *(She does.)* Now that you've heard some of the animals speak, does anyone want to share how you felt during our earth image skit?

LISA: Ashamed. Humans act as if we're the only creatures who have any rights.

ROY: I think I just became a vegetarian.

TEACHER: Remember that most meat packing companies use hog immobilizers and other methods for minimizing an animal's pain and terror.

ROY: It was scary on the truck, too.

TEACHER: How do you feel about the dog whose owner put treats on his nose and made him wait to get them?

LISA: I saw my uncle do that with his dog once, and I felt sorry for the poor dog. It seemed so mean and senseless.

ROY: Your uncle wanted to show his power.

JANE: He had the power not to get the treat out in the first place.

TEACHER: Do you see any correlation between that dog scene and the deer who was being hunted?

JANE: Power again, huh?

WENDY: It's terrible to be helpless. To not have any power. *(The others are surprised to have WENDY volunteer an opinion.)* The dog and the deer were both in that position.

LISA: So was the elephant.

ROY: So was the pig.

BARRY: Come on, you're putting human thoughts in the animals' heads. We don't know if the deer are really scared of the hunters.

LISA: Oh, get serious. Of course they're scared. They run away, don't they?

BARRY: Well, it's legal to hunt deer and it's legal to eat pork chops and it's legal to train your dog any way you want. I don't see what everybody's looking so guilty about. None of us ever cut the tusks off an elephant.

WENDY: Just because something is legal doesn't mean it's right. *(The others are astonished at this remark.)*

BARRY: What are you, a Supreme Court justice?

ROY: Can you honestly say that you could go home right now and eat a pork chop?

BARRY: You bet I could. With applesauce on the side.

JANE: You're disgusting.

BARRY: Now, wait a minute. How many of you ate meat yesterday? *(No answer. They all look at each other.)* I rest my case.

TEACHER: The purpose of this class was not to make you into vegetarians. It was to help you realize that we are not the only inhabitants of our planet. Our attitudes and actions affect thousands of species besides our own.

LISA: No elephant should have to die so that some person can have ivory cuff links.

TEACHER: What if there are people, living in poverty, who kill elephants and sell the ivory in order to get money so they have enough food?

JANE: There should be other ways to escape poverty.

LISA: It's still wrong to kill the elephants.

TEACHER: Our time is nearly up. *(BARRY raises fist in silent cheer.)* Before we leave, each animal will offer a gift to us humans.

JANE: It seems more like we owe them a present.

TEACHER: Roy, we'll start with you. What does the pig offer us?

ROY: Tolerance. As pig, I knew fear, but not hatred.

JANE: Dog offers loyalty. Even when my master hit me and forced me to balance my treat on my nose, I still loved him. I remained loyal.

TEACHER: Elephant? What gift do you give us?

LISA: Stability. I have endured for thousands of years; I do not change my ways.

TEACHER: Caterpillar?

WENDY: Caterpillar isn't here. Butterfly offers faith. If we believe in our own inner beauty, we can change and become that which we admire.

TEACHER: Deer? Do you have a gift for the humans?

BARRY: You bet I do. Venison steaks.

JANE: Why don't you grow up?

LISA: He can't. His mentality is stuck at age one.

BARRY: What's the matter with everybody? Why are you all picking on me all of a sudden?

TEACHER: I hope you'll think about other life forms more often because of today's class. Imagine the results of your actions, and take responsibility for them. Care about all of earth, not just yourself. Class is dismissed. *(TEACHER exits. Others stand and start to leave.)*

LISA: That was pretty heavy stuff.

ROY: I was going to make a joke out of being a pig and then, all of a sudden, I had this image of the slaughter house, and it seemed so real. *(LISA, JANE and ROY all exit. As WENDY walks off, BARRY goes up behind her and punches her. She whirls around to face him.)*

WENDY: If you ever touch me again, I will report you to the principal *and* to the police.

BARRY: Huh?

WENDY: You will get kicked out of school. I will charge you with harassment. If I have to, I will take you to court.

BARRY: *(Puts hands up, as if in surrender)* OK, OK. I was only kidding.

WENDY: In the future, keep your hands to yourself and stay out of my way. *(WENDY marches decisively off.)*

BARRY: *(Dumbfounded, he watches her leave.)* **Some butterfly.** *(He exits.)*

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STANDARD ANSWERS

CAST: One PARENT, four STUDENTS.

No setting necessary.

AT RISE: The four STUDENTS are seated on the floor. PARENT, standing, addresses the audience.

PARENT: I am Parent. I am Author. All other parents in the universe use my book as their guide to raising children. They use it now; they used it a hundred years ago; they will use it in the future. It is timeless and ageless.

It is the best-kept secret ever. All parents know about it; kids never know, until they grow up and become parents themselves, and by then, they are ready to use my book and so they willingly perpetuate the secret, keeping it going throughout infinity.

What book? you ask. All right. I will share the secret, even though some of you in the audience are not yet parents yourselves. I am the author of *The Parents' Book of Standard Answers.* You may have wondered why it is that parents in New York City and parents in Taos, New Mexico, will answer certain questions exactly the same way. It is because they all use my book.

To demonstrate the remarkable universality of my book, I have asked three students to assist me. *(Three STUDENTS stand.)* No matter what they say to me, my replies will come from *The Parents' Book of Standard Answers.*

STUDENT ONE: I studied for that test. I don't know why I failed it.

PARENT: You didn't study hard enough.

STUDENT TWO: I'm full.

PARENT: Eat your vegetables, or you don't get dessert.

STUDENT THREE: Why can't I go? Give me one good reason.

PARENT: Because I said so.

STUDENT ONE: It isn't fair.

PARENT: Life isn't always fair.

STUDENT TWO: All the other kids are doing it.

PARENT: I don't care what the other kids do. You are not the other kids.

STUDENT THREE: Can I go now?

PARENT: *May* I go now?

STUDENT ONE: Can I take the car to school today?

PARENT: What's wrong with the bus?

STUDENT TWO: Can I take the car to school today?

PARENT: When I was your age, I used to walk two miles to school every day.

STUDENT THREE: Don't you trust me?

PARENT: I remember what I was like at your age.

STUDENT ONE: Why do I have to clean my room? It just gets dirty again.

PARENT: If you don't clean your room, you'll have spider nests in it.

STUDENT TWO: I think I'll quit school and get a job.

PARENT: You'll be sorry.

STUDENT THREE: I want to make some money so I can buy a car.

PARENT: Something wrong with your legs?

STUDENT TWO: Someday I'm leaving this hick town. I'll travel all over the world.

PARENT: There's no place like home.

STUDENT ONE: You're mean.

PARENT: It's for your own good.

STUDENT TWO: Why can't I go? Give me one good reason.

PARENT: Someday, when you're my age, you'll understand.

STUDENT THREE: I didn't ask to be born.

PARENT: Well, it's too late now.

STUDENT ONE: There's nothing to eat around here.

PARENT: Have an apple.

STUDENT TWO: There's nothing to do around here.

PARENT: Read a book.

STUDENT THREE: I'm bored.

PARENT: Mow the lawn. *(Fourth STUDENT leaps to his feet and shouts:)*

STUDENT FOUR: I am Child. I am Author. I also wrote a book that has been used for decades. Every child intuitively knows my book; it is part of the wisdom of the ages, which is passed along on the wind. My book is ***The Kids' Book of Standard Answers.***

PARENT: What are you doing?

STUDENT FOUR: Nothing.

PARENT: Don't interrupt.

STUDENT FOUR: I'm not interrupting. I'm joining the conversation.

PARENT: We'll discuss this later.

STUDENT FOUR: I want to discuss it now.

PARENT: This isn't a good time for it.

STUDENT FOUR: Why not?

PARENT: Drink your milk.

STUDENT FOUR: I'm full.

PARENT: Who ate all the cookies?

STUDENT FOUR: Not me.

PARENT: Who tracked mud on the carpet?

STUDENT FOUR: I don't know.

PARENT: Did you hear what I said?

STUDENT FOUR: Huh?

PARENT: You kids are driving me crazy with your fighting.

STUDENT FOUR: He hit me first.

PARENT: You've been on the phone for forty-five minutes. Someone may be trying to call.

STUDENT FOUR: Who?

PARENT: I don't know who, but it's time for you to hang up.

STUDENT FOUR: I'm not done talking.

PARENT: Brussels sprouts are good for you.

STUDENT FOUR: Yuck.

PARENT: This concludes our demonstration.

STUDENT ONE: Wait a minute. I'm not finished.

STUDENT TWO: Me, either. I want to say more.

STUDENT THREE: Why do we have to stop now?

PARENT: Because I said so. *(Four STUDENTS look at each other, shrug helplessly, and exit, followed by PARENT.)*

INVISIBLE BOXES

CAST: Three players: ANDREW, PHIL, WALLY.

SETTING: School.

(ANDREW is On Stage at start. PHIL enters.)

PHIL: You are not going to believe this. Wally Humphrey was in the box!

ANDREW: What box?

PHIL: The big cardboard box. The one Miss Winthrip got from the appliance store, to use as a prop for the school play. She was going to clean the stage and when she pushed the box to move it, it wouldn't budge. Turns out Wally was inside it.

ANDREW: Why?

PHIL: Good question. Why would anyone want to sit inside an empty cardboard box?

ANDREW: I suppose so he wouldn't have to go to class. In homeroom yesterday, Mr. Thomas asked Wally why he kept cutting classes, and Wally said because school is boring.

PHIL: Sitting alone in a box isn't?

ANDREW: I wonder how he got in it. It must be six feet high.

PHIL: It was upside down, so all he had to do was lift up one side and crawl under. Talk about weird! He practically scared Miss Winthrip to death. She tipped the box over, to see why it wouldn't move, and there was Wally.

ANDREW: It would be dark in the box. He couldn't read or anything. How long was he in there?

PHIL: Since third period.

ANDREW: That's more than three hours! I wonder how long he would have stayed if Miss Winthrip hadn't found him.

PHIL: He was probably going to hide there until school was out and everyone had left and then vandalize the school.

ANDREW: It's sad, isn't it, that anyone would rather sit all alone in an empty box than to attend class? He must really

hate school.

PHIL: You'd hate school, too, if you were flunking practically every subject. Of course, it's his own fault. He cuts class half the time, and he never does any assignments.

ANDREW: Does he have any friends?

PHIL: Not that I know of. He's a loner.

ANDREW: I wonder what his family is like. Maybe he has problems at home.

PHIL: Lots of kids have problems at home; that doesn't mean they drop out of society and shut themselves up in an empty box.

ANDREW: Look. Wally's coming out of the principal's office right now. I'm going to ask him why he did it.

PHIL: I wouldn't do that. He might get mad.

ANDREW: Why would he get mad? I'm just curious. *(WALLY enters. When he sees ANDREW and PHIL, he tries to avoid them. ANDREW goes up to WALLY.)* I hear you were hiding in that big box. *(WALLY keeps walking.)* What was it like inside? Could you hear anything?

WALLY: *(Stops)* What's it to you?

ANDREW: It sounds like fun. I wish I'd thought of doing that.

PHIL: You do?

ANDREW: It was a good joke on Miss Winthrip. I'll bet she nearly fainted when she looked in that box.

WALLY: *(Warming up)* She was pretty surprised.

ANDREW: If she hadn't found you, how long were you going to stay?

WALLY: *(Shrugs)* I don't know.

ANDREW: If I had hidden in the box, I would have stayed until everyone went home for the night.

WALLY: Yeah. Yeah, me, too.

ANDREW: It would be cool to be the only one here. I'd like that.

PHIL: I wouldn't.

WALLY: I would.

ANDREW: If I were the only one here, I'd leave messages on all the blackboards. Everyone would go nuts the next day trying to figure out who wrote them.

WALLY: I was going to shoot baskets.

ANDREW: I didn't know you played basketball. Are you going to go out for the basketball team?

WALLY: Naw.

ANDREW: You should. You're tall. I'll bet you're good at basketball, aren't you?

WALLY: I don't know. I've never played.

PHIL: You've never played basketball?

WALLY: I have to go now. *(WALLY starts walking again. ANDREW and PHIL walk with him.)*

ANDREW: We're thinking of trying out for basketball. Practice starts next week. Why don't you go with us?

WALLY: I told you. I don't play basketball.

ANDREW: You could learn.

PHIL: We aren't very good. You wouldn't be out-classed or anything.

ANDREW: That's right. It's just fun to play.

WALLY: *(Hesitates slightly, as if tempted to say yes. Then he shakes his head no.)* I'm too busy. I've got better things to do than run around some stupid gym. *(He exits.)*

PHIL: What a jerk.

ANDREW: I feel sorry for him. He's lonely.

PHIL: That's because he won't talk to anyone.

ANDREW: He talked to us.

PHIL: Briefly. Just long enough to tell us he had better things to do.

ANDREW: He's afraid.

PHIL: Huh?

ANDREW: He's scared. He thinks he won't be any good at basketball, so he's afraid to try.

PHIL: What makes you think that? Maybe he just doesn't want to play. He said he's too busy.

ANDREW: He had time to sit all alone in an empty box. For people like Wally, it's easier not to go out for basketball than to risk getting cut from the team. And it's easier to sit inside an empty box than to try to learn something in class.

PHIL: Well, if that's how he feels, there isn't much we can do about it.

ANDREW: No. But I wish there were.

PHIL: Don't waste too much time worrying about Wally. Now that he got caught, I doubt if he'll go back in that box again.

ANDREW: It's Wally's other boxes that concern me. The invisible ones. Those are what keep him from learning to play basketball and talking to other kids. They keep him out of class, too.

PHIL: Invisible boxes?

ANDREW: Invisible boxes that he builds himself.

PHIL: Come on. Let's go shoot some baskets. I need the practice.

ANDREW: So do I. *(They exit.)*

FIVE MINUTES TO CHANGE THE WORLD

CAST: Five players, either sex, and CONTROLLER.

AT RISE: Characters ONE, TWO, THREE FOUR and FIVE are On Stage.

ONE: Our parents made a mess of the world.

TWO: The oceans are polluted. The air is polluted.

THREE: There's overpopulation.

FOUR: Oil spills. Litter.

ONE: Wars. Famine.

THREE: Homelessness. Drugs. Crime.

FIVE: Animals are becoming extinct.

ONE: Child abuse. Illiteracy.

TWO: There are nothing but problems everywhere. The older generation was totally irresponsible.

FIVE: If *we* were in charge, this never would have happened.

TWO: We would have world peace. And a clean environment.

FOUR: If teens ran the world, things would be different.

ONE: No one would go hungry.

THREE: Give us just five minutes with the world leaders and we could tell them how to improve the whole planet. *(CONTROLLER rushes in.)*

CONTROLLER: Stop!

OTHERS: Who's that? What? What do you want? *(Etc.)*

CONTROLLER: I am Controller. I decide who is in charge of the world. I have heard your complaints, and I think you are right. The world is in a mess. The adults have botched up the job.

FIVE: Controller? I never heard about any controller.

THREE: Are you God's assistant?

CONTROLLER: I am no one's assistant. I am in charge.

TWO: Hi, boss.

CONTROLLER: I have decided to give you a chance to save the world. Right here. Right now. When I say "go," you will

have five minutes to decide what changes you want to make and how you will make them. It is not enough to say you want world peace; you must also say how you plan to achieve it.

FOUR: Five minutes isn't very long for such an important job.

CONTROLLER: All you must do is tell me how to proceed. I'll see that your plans are carried out.

TWO: Do you have anything to do with raising allowances?

ONE: Five minutes is better than nothing. Let's do it.

CONTROLLER: Ready? *(Others nod yes.)* Go.

ONE: I think the first problem we have to solve is hunger. When people don't have enough to eat, they can't think about anything else.

FOUR: People in the U.S. should share their food with the poor countries.

THREE: We spend millions of dollars a year on diet foods while other people are starving.

FOUR: How do we get the food to those who need it?

TWO: Let's fly it over and drop bundles down to areas that need food. Can't you just see it? Millions of cupcakes falling from the sky. *(He sings)* "Twinkie, Twinkie, little star."

ONE: Who pays for the airplanes?

THREE: The government.

FIVE: If the government does it, taxes will go up.

FOUR: *We* are the government.

ONE: We have to be careful that the food doesn't go to unscrupulous people who sell it on the black market. How do we know who to trust?

THREE: What about spoilage? Bread would get stale.

FOUR: We would send flour and yeast. Powdered milk. Dried fruit.

FIVE: Do those people have ovens? How do they cook?

ONE: What about utensils? Bowls and cups? If we send powdered milk, do they have something to mix it in? Some way to drink it?

TWO: This is getting too complicated. Let's tackle one of the other problems first.

THREE: Pollution.

FOUR: Yes. Let's get rid of pollution.

FIVE: Let's ban all automobiles.

TWO: No way. I'm almost through driver's training. I'll get my license in a couple of weeks.

THREE: Do you want clean air, or do you want to drive a car?

TWO: Both.

FIVE: Not just cars. We should ban all motor vehicles.

ONE: My dad is a sales rep. Without a car, he'd have no job.

TWO: At least we'd know what to do with the extra food. We could give it to you.

THREE: Couldn't he call his customers and take orders by telephone?

ONE: He has new products twice a year. The store owners want to see them, before they order.

FOUR: What about trucks? Should we ban trucks, too?

ONE: Without trucks, how would the food get to the supermarkets?

FOUR: If nobody had a car, we would all shop at neighborhood stores.

THREE: It would be like the old days. My grandparents are always telling how they grew all their own vegetables, and every year they raised a steer and slaughtered it for meat.

ONE: Gross.

FOUR: I don't think the manager of the apartment where we live would be too happy if we had a steer on the balcony.

TWO: You could have a pig instead. Or chickens.

FOUR: There's an old lady in the apartment next to us who gets Meals on Wheels. Without them, she'd never have a decent dinner.

FIVE: Maybe we can't ban all motor vehicles.

THREE: Who decides which ones are OK and which are not?

FOUR: We could allow delivery trucks and business cars, but no personal cars.

ONE: There would be a lot of people who suddenly claimed they needed their car for business purposes.

FIVE: What about school buses?

TWO: Ban the buses! Close the schools. But not until after I finish driver's training.

ONE: Think of all the industries that are dependent on people being able to drive. My father wouldn't be the only one out of work. Our whole economy would have to change.

CONTROLLER: Your time is half gone.

THREE: Half gone! We haven't decided anything yet.

FOUR: Air pollution is too complicated. Let's start with something smaller, something we know we can change.

FIVE: Overpopulation. How do we get birth control information to people who need it?

THREE: Are there charities that do this? If there are, we could have a fund raiser and give them the money.

ONE: Remember the big flap between some parents and the school board last year because birth control information was available at our school?

TWO: Right. And I didn't even need it. *(Others all look at him. TWO shrugs.)*

FIVE: If we do anything to promote birth control, it's sure to cause a controversy.

FOUR: Let's start with drugs and alcohol. They cause so many other problems, and none of the parents would object.

THREE: Good idea. I say we ban all drugs.

ONE: Drugs are already banned.

THREE: We could make alcohol illegal.

FIVE: They tried that years ago. Prohibition. It didn't work. People kept drinking, only they did it secretly.

ONE: Just like they do drugs now.

FOUR: It's a problem either way, whether there are laws against it or not.

THREE: Then what good does it do to try to change things? It won't make any difference what we decide.

CONTROLLER: You have two more minutes.

TWO: Maybe our parents weren't totally irresponsible. Maybe they tried to solve some of these problems and weren't able to.

FIVE: Our grandparents, too.

ONE: Maybe we can't change the whole world. Maybe what we have to do is change ourselves.

FIVE: And each of us could try to influence one other person and have them do the same until eventually it makes a difference.

THREE: I make a commitment never to use drugs or alcohol. Will you join me?

TWO: Not even a beer now and then?

THREE: Not even a beer.

FOUR: I join you.

FIVE: Me, too.

ONE: Me, too. And I make a commitment to volunteer at least four hours a month with the Red Cross or the Salvation Army or some other agency that helps feed the hungry people.

THREE: I'll go with you.

FIVE: I will give up junk food and donate the money I save to a group that helps save endangered animals.

TWO: Wow! I've seen you eat. You'll probably save the elephants single-handed.

FOUR: I can't stop pollution, but I will pick up litter at the city park. I'll recycle the cans and paper I find and dispose of the other trash.

FIVE: That's a great idea. I'll help you do that. I know where we can take recyclable plastic, too.

THREE: Five minutes ago, we set out to save the world. Now we're reduced to picking up other people's trash. What's wrong with us?

ONE: Nothing's wrong. The problems don't have easy solutions.

FOUR: We're being practical. We have to start somewhere.

ONE: *(Turns to TWO)* What about you, *(Name)*? You haven't agreed to any of these changes. What do you plan to do?

TWO: Are there any volunteer jobs where you get to drive? *(They all stare at him, waiting.)* All right, all right. When I get my license, I won't drive unless it's a necessary trip.

FIVE: No cruising?

TWO: *(It pains him to say this.)* No cruising.

THREE: It's a start.

TWO: It's a sacrifice.

CONTROLLER: Time's up. What instructions do you have for me?

THREE: None.

FOUR: We couldn't figure out any solutions. We had our chance to save the world, and we blew it.

ONE: No, we didn't. *(Turns to CONTROLLER)* Here are your instructions: Every person is to make one change that will benefit the world.

FIVE: We'll start small,

ONE: And grow,

THREE: And become powerful.

FOUR: Eventually, we'll make a difference.

ONE: Even if it means personal sacrifice.

TWO: Like no cruising.

CONTROLLER: You have used your five minutes well. Your instructions will be carried out. *(CONTROLLER exits, followed by others.)*

ONLY A FEW BEERS

CAST: Five players: JUDGE, DANIEL, BROTHER, FIANCÉE, FRIEND.

SETTING: Suggests a courtroom. JUDGE sits behind table or desk. DANIEL sits to one side. BROTHER, FIANCÉE and FRIEND sit together on the other side.

JUDGE: Court is now in session. Our first hearing is the case of Daniel Modum. Would the accused please stand?

DANIEL: *(Stands)* This hearing is unnecessary. I don't understand why I have to do this.

JUDGE: You broke the law.

DANIEL: All I did was buy a six-pack of beer. That's all. I didn't hurt anybody.

JUDGE: In this state, it is against the law for anyone under the age of eighteen to purchase alcohol.

DANIEL: OK, OK. Why can't I just pay a fine, like I do with a parking ticket?

JUDGE: You'll have an opportunity to pay your fine, but first we will proceed with the hearing. Three people have offered to testify.

DANIEL: Testify to what? I admitted I bought the beer. Why do you need witnesses? *(He looks around.)* What did you do, subpoena everyone who was in the liquor store that night to come and swear I bought a six-pack of beer?

JUDGE: These people were not present when you bought the beer.

DANIEL: Then how can they testify against me?

JUDGE: They are not here to testify against you. As you pointed out, you have already admitted your guilt. These people merely want the chance to tell you about someone they loved.

DANIEL: What kind of a goofy hearing is this?

JUDGE: You will be seated, please. I call the first witness.

BROTHER: *(Stands)* I am the brother of Natalie Wilcox. The driver of the car that hit her swore he wasn't drunk, that he'd had only a few beers. Natalie was my only sister. She's been gone four years, but my family still has not recovered.

Natalie would have graduated from high school this year, if she had lived. When my mother saw the graduation ceremony announced in the newspaper, she burst into tears.

JUDGE: Daniel, do you have anything to say to Natalie Wilcox's brother?

DANIEL: No. I'm sorry about his sister, but it doesn't have anything to do with me. I'm not the one who killed her.

JUDGE: Next witness, please. *(BROTHER sits. FIANCÉE stands.)*

FIANCÉE: I am the fiancée of Adam Morrow. We were high school sweethearts and got engaged during our first year of college. We planned to be married on August thirtieth and then both work part time and go to school part time. We planned eventually to open a business together. And we wanted three kids. We even had their names picked out.

Adam was killed four days before our wedding. August twenty-sixth at 7:03 p.m. It was still daylight. The driver of the car that hit him said she had been at a company picnic. She'd had a couple of beers and a glass of wine. That's all, she said. Not enough to impair her judgment.

Adam and I will never have children now. *(She starts to cry.)* We'll never open that business. I'll never forget him, and I'm here today because I still love him. *(She is overcome with sobs and sits down.)*

JUDGE: Thank you.

DANIEL: How much more of this do I have to listen to?

JUDGE: One more. I call the final witness for this hearing, Friend of Ralph Balexy.

FRIEND: I used to be like you, Daniel. I thought it was cool to have a few beers and who did it harm? My buddies and I used to meet in the parking lot of the city tennis courts. We sat around and drank and told jokes and talked. Nothing bad. And then one night, after one of these outings, the phone rang in the middle of the night. As long as I live, I will never forget that voice. It was the mother of my best buddy, and she was crying so hard, I could hardly understand her. It took a few seconds for it to sink in: "Ralph is dead," she told me. "His car went off the road and ran into a telephone pole." I remember thinking, she's wrong. They've made a mistake, Ralph can't be dead; he brought me home only a couple of hours ago.

I was a pall bearer at Ralph's funeral. Have you ever lifted a casket, Daniel? Have you ever watched the body of your best buddy be lowered into the ground? *(DANIEL squirms, looks away, doesn't answer.)*

JUDGE: You may be seated, Friend of Ralph Balexy. Daniel, is there anything you want to say to these people?

DANIEL: No. What can anyone say?

JUDGE: The next time you want a six-pack of beer, I hope you will remember Natalie Wilcox, Adam Morrow and Ralph Balexy. You may pay your fine to the Clerk of Court.

I thank the rest of you for your testimony. This concludes the hearing. *(All exit.)*

57

RED ROSES FOR A DEAD CAT

CAST: Four players: LARRY, ROBYN, FRED, MARIE.

SETTING: No special setting required.

AT RISE: ROBYN and FRED are On Stage. LARRY hurries in.

ROBYN: Where's Marie?

LARRY: That's why I'm late. Oh, it was awful.

FRED: What's wrong? Did something happen to Marie?

LARRY: We were just down the street—over by the shopping center—and all of a sudden a cat darted out from between two cars, and Marie couldn't stop in time.

ROBYN: Oh, no. Her car hit the cat?

LARRY: Killed it. It wasn't Marie's fault. She slammed on the brakes, but there was no way she could have stopped in time.

FRED: That's terrible.

ROBYN: Poor Marie.

LARRY: We heard a thud and knew we'd hit the cat. I told Marie to keep going, that we didn't want to look, but she insisted on stopping. She said it might not be dead, and we would have to take it to a veterinarian. But it was dead, all right. There was blood all over the street, and the cat just lay there. Marie felt it, just to be sure there was no heartbeat.

ROBYN: Bleah. How could she stand to touch it?

LARRY: I felt sorry for the cat, but I almost felt sorrier for Marie. She was crying and her hands were shaking. You'd have thought she hit some kid instead of just a cat.

FRED: Did it have a collar on? An identification tag?

LARRY: No. We looked. We were going to call the owners to tell them what had happened, but it didn't have a collar. It was a pretty cat, though, black with white feet, and it looked sleek and well fed. Not like a stray.

FRED: It was probably someone's pet, but they didn't get it

a tag.

LARRY: That's what we thought.

ROBYN: So where is Marie now? Did she go home?

LARRY: No. She . . . you won't believe this. She went to buy flowers for the cat.

ROBYN: Flowers!

FRED: Are you serious?

ROBYN: What for?

LARRY: She said if it *is* someone's pet, she doesn't want them to go out looking for it and find it dead on the side of the street and think that the person who hit it didn't even care about it.

FRED: The owners didn't care too much about it themselves, or they would have had the cat wear a tag.

LARRY: I told her that.

ROBYN: It might not belong to anybody.

LARRY: She said if it didn't belong to anyone, then the flowers would be for the cat. She said all life is sacred, and she can't leave it there without doing anything.

FRED: Why didn't you get a shovel and bury it?

LARRY: I suggested that, too. Marie said if someone is looking for it and we bury it, then the owners would never know what happened and they'd worry and wonder and go around for days calling, "Kitty, Kitty, Kitty." She said she'll go back in a couple of days, and if the cat is still there, she'll bury it then. Meanwhile, she went to buy some flowers, and I walked on over here. *(MARIE enters.)*

ROBYN: Hi, Marie. We're sorry about the cat.

FRED: That was rotten luck, having it jump out in front of your car like that.

LARRY: Did you get some flowers?

MARIE: Yes. Three red roses.

FRED: Roses! Roses cost a buck apiece.

LARRY: Where did you put them?

MARIE: I laid them on top of the cat. If his owner finds him now, he'll know that I am sorry. He'll know that we stopped and made sure the cat didn't need help.

FRED: There are hundreds of unwanted cats roaming the streets, you know. Some people would have given themselves five points for hitting it.

ROBYN: That's true. There are mean people who do things like that.

MARIE: I know that. That's why I couldn't just drive away and do nothing. Don't you see? It's because there *are* people like that—cruel people who think it's a joke to see an animal suffer—that I had to show my sorrow.

ROBYN: The next person down the street could steal the flowers. The owner might not ever know that anyone put roses there.

FRED: And the cat sure as heck doesn't know.

MARIE: But I know. I ended that cat's life—

LARRY: Through no fault of your own—

MARIE: True, through no fault of my own. But I ended a life, and I had to do something to honor it. Maybe the roses weren't for either the owner or the cat. Maybe the roses were for me.

FRED: Man, people driving down the street are going to wonder what the heck's going on when they see a dead cat lying there with three red roses on top of it.

ROBYN: They won't know what to say.

MARIE: Yes, they will. They'll say, "Someone thought that cat was important."

LARRY: And they'll be right.

58

SOMEDAY LIFE WILL BE SWEET

CAST: Eight players: RICHARD, SYD, ELLIE, PEG, CARL, BETH, MELISSA, DOUG.

SETTING: No special setting.

AT RISE: RICHARD, SYD, ELLIE and MELISSA are on one side of the playing area. PEG, CARL, BETH and DOUG are on the other side. All face the audience.

RICHARD: Man, I can't wait until I finish school. I'll be so glad to quit studying.

SYD: When I get my driver's license, things will be great. No more bus. No more begging for rides.

ELLIE: As soon as I'm old enough, I'm going to get my own apartment. If I don't, my little brothers will drive me insane.

RICHARD, SYD and ELLIE: Life will be sweet when that happens; oh, yes. Someday life will be sweet.

RICHARD: Meanwhile, it's the same, old drudgery. Homework. Tests. Deadlines. It wears me out.

SYD: Eventually, I'll have a car of my own. Then I'll really be free.

ELLIE: I get so sick of their noise and crying and mess. My house is like living in a daycare.

RICHARD: Things will be different when I'm out of school. I'll never open another book.

SYD: Things will be different when I can drive. You won't find me on a bus, ever again.

ELLIE: Things will be different when I have my own apartment. Everything will be quiet and clean. I will never watch another Saturday-morning cartoon.

RICHARD, SYD and ELLIE: Life will be sweet when that happens; oh, yes. Someday life will be sweet.

PEG: My favorite class this year is speech and drama. I've never memorized so much in my life, but it's worth it.

CARL: Six months ago, I started riding my bike to school. My

stamina increased so much that I began running a couple of miles every day. I used to feel flabby; now my muscles are firm.

BETH: I'm teaching my kid sister to play the guitar. We're going to surprise our grandparents and play a duet for their wedding anniversary.

PEG: I'm going to try out for the class play. I hope I get a part, but if I don't, I'll take tickets or usher.

CARL: Right now, I'm training to do a triathlon. I don't expect to win it, but I think I can finish. I know I'll never be on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*, but I like to challenge myself.

BETH: Even if Susie and I are never great on the guitar, we have a lot of fun practicing.

ALL: Life is sweet now; oh, yes; oh, yes. Life is so sweet, right now.

MELISSA: My mom has a new boyfriend. They're going to get married next summer. Man, I can hardly wait because he is loaded. I'll be able to buy anything I want.

ELLIE: It's rotten to be the oldest child in a family. I always have to be responsible for the younger kids, and I'm expected to do way more work than they are. It isn't fair. When I grow up, I intend to have a maid.

SYD: When I have my own car, I'm going to take off and see the world. I can travel cheap. Camp out. Cook over a campfire. Anything to get away from this dull town.

MELISSA: Things will be different when Mom gets married. We'll have all the money we want.

ELLIE: It will be different someday. Nobody to boss me around, and no bratty, little brothers always whining for me to play with them.

RICHARD: Two more years. If I can just make it through two more years, I'll be OK.

SYD: Wheels. That's the secret to happiness. Get your own set of wheels.

MELISSA: Money. That's the key. When I have enough money, my life will be great.

RICHARD, ELLIE, MELISSA and SYD: Life will be sweet when that happens. Oh, yes. Someday life will be sweet.

DOUG: I've been doing a lot of babysitting lately. As soon as I save up seventy-five dollars, I can get a cat. The cat is free, but I have to pay for vaccinations and to have it neutered.

CARL: Every Saturday, the morning paper prints what's going on around town. Last week, I went to an outdoor jazz festival. Next week, there's going to be a crafts fair. The trouble is, there isn't time to do everything that I'd like to do.

DOUG: The kids I sit for are so neat. I'd forgotten how much fun it is to blow bubbles and finger paint and work puzzles.

PEG: The first speech I gave was pretty awful. I was so nervous my knees shook. But each one got easier and now I look forward to giving my speeches. I feel confident.

BETH: I didn't want to move here. I cried and cried when my dad got transferred. But now I wouldn't go back to my old school for anything. I learned there are good people everywhere, and if you're happy within yourself, it doesn't matter where you live.

DOUG: I started babysitting for the money. I like it so much, I've decided to be a kindergarten teacher.

CARL: There are free travel movies at the library on Wednesday nights. Each one is about a different state. So far, I liked the one about Arizona best.

BETH: My sister used to get on my nerves, but when we moved, I didn't have anyone else to talk to for awhile and I discovered she isn't so bad. Yesterday, she baked coconut cookies, which are my most favorite food in the whole world. She said it was a thank you, for the guitar lessons.

PEG, CARL, BETH and DOUG: Life is so sweet right now; oh, yes. Life is so sweet right now.

SYD: There is never anything to do in this town. There's no teen center; no place for kids to hang out. Without a car, I am stuck in Dullsville.

CARL: I have to miss the next movie, the one on New Mexico. My softball team has a game scheduled that night.

RICHARD: Grades, grades, grades. I am sick of worrying about getting good grades. The day I get my last report card will be the happiest day of my life.

PEG: I applied for a part-time job last week, and three people interviewed me, all at the same time. Instead of being terrified, I was actually relaxed. After all those speeches in class, it was easy to face only three people. I got the job.

ELLIE: Privacy. That's all I want. Just a little privacy. And someday, I'm going to have it.

BETH: I was so lonely when we first moved. Now I have great friends. We're having a barbecue at my house Friday night. A potluck.

MELISSA: I'm going to throw out every stitch in my closet and buy a whole new wardrobe. I can hardly wait.

SYD: First my license, then a car, and then I'm out of here.

RICHARD, SYD, MELISSA and ELLIE: Someday life will be sweet; oh yes.

PEG, CARL, DOUG and BETH: Life is so sweet right now.

59

DEAR JAN SLANDER

CAST: Eight players, four females, four males: TRISH, JAN SLANDER, MOTHER, ELLIE, JEREMY, DARREL, WAYNE, FATHER.

SETTING: No setting required.

AT RISE: All are On Stage. All except JAN SLANDER have pencil and paper. JAN SLANDER has a whole handful of letters.

TRISH: Dear Jan Slander: There's this guy I like, named Jeremy, who doesn't notice I'm alive. How do I get him to notice me? Signed: Perplexed.

SLANDER: Dear Perplexed: Whenever he looks at you, smile.

JEREMY: Dear Jan Slander: There's a girl at my school who is driving me crazy. She follows me around all the time with a simpy grin on her face. How can I get her to stop? Signed: Weary.

SLANDER: Dear Weary: Whenever you see her grinning at you, turn away. She'll soon get the hint.

JEREMY: Dear Jan Slander: The girl I wrote you about is still grinning. I know she wants me to ask her out, but I'd date my friend's pet rat before I'd go out with her. How do I get her to bug off? Signed: Weary.

SLANDER: Dear Weary: You need to be blunt. Come right out and tell her to leave you alone.

TRISH: Dear Jan Slander: I think the guy I like likes me, too, because he's always kidding around and telling me things like "Bug off, stupid." How do I get him to ask me out? Signed: Perplexed.

SLANDER: Dear Perplexed: Why would you want to go out with someone who calls you stupid and tells you to bug off? I suggest you look for a different boyfriend.

TRISH: Dear Jan Slander: Boy, were you ever right. I'm so glad I dumped that Jeremy. His brother, Darrel, is twice as cute and a better football player besides. He hasn't asked me out yet, but I'm still smiling. Signed: Happy Face.

DARREL: Dear Jan Slander: Thanks a lot. There's a drippy girl who always used to follow my brother around, until you told her to leave him alone and get a new boyfriend. So who did she choose? You guessed it. Signed: Second Choice.

SLANDER: Dear Second Choice: Sorry about that.

MOTHER: Dear Jan Slander: I am worried about my daughter. She keeps developing crushes on boys who don't care for her. Today, I had a call from a father who told me that Trish has been making a nuisance of herself, trying to impress this man's sons. Should I tell my daughter about this call? Should I insist she stay away from these boys? Please advise. Signed: Worried Mother.

SLANDER: Dear Worried Mother: Tell your daughter about the call at once. When she learns how the objects of her affection feel about her, she'll cool off in a hurry.

TRISH: Dear Jan Slander: Whoopee! Darrel must like me even more than I thought because, guess what? His father is jealous! He even called up my mother and told her to keep me away from his son. He's probably afraid we're going to elope. Now that I know for sure how Darrel feels about me, it's easy to keep smiling.

DARREL: Dear Jan Slander: You said you were sorry, but I need advice, not apologies. How do I get the grinning girl who likes me to leave me alone? She does not take a hint. Signed: Sick of Her Smile.

SLANDER: Dear Sick: Perhaps you could talk frankly to one of her friends and ask them to pass your feelings along.

TRISH: Dear Jan Slander: The most romantic thing happened today. During sixth period, Darrel sent a note to my friend, Ellie, and when she opened it, it said, *Dear Ellie, Please meet me in the gymnasium after school. I need to talk to you about Trish.* Isn't that incredible? The poor, shy fellow wanted Ellie to tell me how much he cares for me. Well, luckily, Ellie showed the note to me and asked me what I wanted her to do. I told her she did not need to act as an intermediary; I would meet Darrel in the gym myself. I did, too. Only when he saw me coming, he was overcome with emotion and ran away. I will treasure the memory forever. Signed: Blissful.

DARREL: Dear Jan Slander: Your advice so far stinks. Since I tried to meet with her friend, things are worse than before. Every time I turn around, there she is. I feel like I have an extra shadow. Could you please write to her and tell her to leave me alone? She pays attention to what you say. Signed: Desperate.

SLANDER: Dear Desperate: Sorry. If you want someone to leave you alone, you will need to tell her yourself.

TRISH: Dear Jan Slander: Ellie just told me that Jeremy told her that Darrel wrote to you about me. Isn't that just the most incredible thing you've ever heard? I mean, here I am, writing to you for advice on how to get him to ask me out, and there he is, writing to you for advice on how to get me to like him. I hope you answer his letter soon. Signed: The Hopeful Happy Face.

ELLIE: Dear Jan Slander: I never wrote to a newspaper before, but I think my friend needs help and I don't know what to do. She has a crush on a boy, Darrel, and she follows him around all the time, and whenever he tells her to leave him alone, she just stands there with this cow-eyed smile on her face. The other kids joke about it and call her toothy. I can see that she's making a fool of herself, but I don't know how to make her see that. What do you suggest? Signed: Ellie, Friend of Toothy.

JEREMY: Dear Jan Slander: The girl that used to follow me has been following my brother for weeks now. She even waits outside the locker room after football practice. She is making him crazy. What do you think I should do? Signed: Worried Brother.

SLANDER: Dear Worried Brother: Don't do anything. Just be glad she quit following you.

FATHER: Dear Jan Slander: Is it possible for a fifteen-year-old to sue for sexual harassment, or do you have to be twenty-one? I think my son has a case. Signed: Worried Father.

SLANDER: Dear Worried Father: I suggest you see an attorney.

TRISH: Dear Jan Slander: You won't believe this, but Darrel's father got so jealous of me that he hired an attorney and the attorney sent a letter to my mother telling her that I had to stop smiling at Darrel. My mother says this is a free country and I can smile at anyone I want to, but I have decided that if Darrel's father is going to interfere with our romance all the time, I would never be happy as Darrel's sweetheart, much less his wife. Therefore, I have decided to find a new boyfriend. Signed: Trish.

WAYNE: Dear Jan Slander: I need help fast. There is this dopey girl at school who has started following me everywhere I go. If I so much as look her direction, she gives me this big, silly grin. How can I get her to leave me alone? Signed: Not Smiling.

SLANDER: Dear Not Smiling: Hire an attorney.

60

DOMINOES

CAST: Ten players.

SETTING: There are ten chairs in a line diagonally across playing area, from Right Front to Left Rear. They are positioned so that the audience sees the profile of anyone who sits.

AT RISE: Each player stands in front of a chair. PERSON ONE is at Right Front; PERSON TEN is at Left Rear.

ONE: When I suggested a bake sale to raise money for our club, Ellen said bake sales are boring and not worth the effort. She really cut me down. That's the last time I suggest anything at a club meeting. *(ONE sits down.)*

TWO: I'm going to join an exercise club, to help me get in shape. It's expensive, but I think it might be worth it for the trainers and equipment.

ONE: *(Turns around to look at TWO)* **If you want to exercise, why not do it at home? You don't need to pay someone to show you how to jump rope.** *(TWO sits down.)*

THREE: There's a help wanted ad in today's paper. It says they need a dishwasher at The Trojan and it says, "No experience necessary." I'm going over there right after school to apply. I've been looking for a part-time job for months, but everywhere I go, they want experience. This ad is the best news I've seen all year.

TWO: *(Turns around to look at THREE)* **My brother worked at The Trojan for awhile. It was awful. They hire kids for practically nothing and make them do all the dirty work and yell at them all the time. I wouldn't work there if I was starving.** *(THREE sits down.)*

FOUR: I got my hair styled last night, at a really good salon. Boy, was that great! Usually, I just go to the cheap, quick haircut places, but this was my birthday present from my grandma. I got a shampoo and conditioner, and a style cut and blow dry. I feel terrific!

THREE: *(Turns around to look at FOUR)* Who cut your hair? Your kid sister? *(FOUR sits down.)*

FIVE: Well, I made it through my piano recital with only one mistake. What a relief. I've been practicing for weeks, but I was afraid I'd go completely blank and sit there staring at the keys as if I'd never heard of Beethoven in my entire life. Instead, it was kind of fun, once I got started.

FOUR: *(Turns around to look at FIVE)* You really blew it in that one place. It must make you mad that you could play your piece perfectly at home and then, when you get in front of an audience, you goof it up. *(FIVE sits down.)*

SIX: Man, that was a thrill to hit my first home run. When I was running around those bases, I felt like I had wings and could fly forever. I'll never forget it.

FIVE: *(Turns to look at SIX)* Too bad you hit the home run with nobody on base and then struck out when there were two runners on. If you had done it the other way around, we would have won. *(SIX sits.)*

SEVEN: Wow! I got an A in English. That's a five-credit course; it will bring my whole grade-point average up.

SIX: *(Turns to look at SEVEN)* What happened in algebra? You went from a B-minus to a C-plus. You'd better be careful or you'll never get into college. *(SEVEN sits.)*

EIGHT: I handled things pretty well last night. I hate it when my folks are like that, but I can't change them. Well, I refuse to let their problem be my problem. I'll never act the way they do, so I'm not going to worry about it anymore.

SEVEN: *(Turns to look at EIGHT)* I hear your old man came home drunk again last night, and the neighbors had to call the cops because he and your mom were fighting. *(EIGHT sits.)*

NINE: James Ellensworth asked me to the prom! I can't believe it. I'm actually going to go to the prom. I thought I was going to sit at home tomorrow night, trying not to cry and pretending it didn't matter, but instead I'll be there dancing, just like everybody else.

EIGHT: *(Turns to look at NINE)* Talk about a last-minute invitation. What happened? Did his date get sick? *(NINE sits.)*

TEN: I saw a terrific movie last night. It was so funny, I practically fell out of my chair laughing. It's called "Little Blue Riding Hood," and I'm going to go see it again tonight. *(TEN taps NINE on the shoulder. NINE looks around.)* Would you like to go to a movie with me tonight? I know it's a last-minute invitation, but I just decided on the spur of the moment to go, and you have such a great sense of humor it would be fun to have you go with me. *(TEN holds out a hand.)*

NINE: *(Stands and takes TEN's hand.)* I'd love to. It sounds like fun. *(TEN smiles and faces audience. At the same time, NINE reaches other hand toward EIGHT and speaks to him.)* You know something? I really admire the way you refuse to let your family problems drag you down. *(EIGHT takes NINE's hand and stands.)* You're a strong person; I admire that. *(NINE smiles and faces audience.)*

EIGHT: *(Holds out hand to SEVEN)* I hear you got an A in English. Congratulations! *(SEVEN takes EIGHT's hand and stands.)* That's the toughest class in the whole school. Only two people got As. You must be really proud. *(EIGHT smiles and faces audience.)*

SEVEN: *(Holds out hand to SIX)* Man, you really belted that baseball. I never saw anyone hit a ball so far. *(SIX takes SEVEN's hand and stands.)* And I never heard such loud cheering, either. *(SEVEN smiles and faces audience.)*

SIX: *(Holds out hand to FIVE)* Your piano piece was terrific. *(FIVE stands and takes SIX's hand.)* I don't see how you can make your fingers go so fast or remember all those notes. It was great. *(SIX smiles and faces audience.)*

FIVE: *(Holds out hand to FOUR)* Your new haircut is really attractive. *(FOUR takes FIVE's hand and stands.)* You should always wear it that way. You look like someone on a

magazine cover. *(FIVE, smiling, faces audience.)*

FOUR: *(Holds out hand to THREE)* **I hear you're going to apply for a job today. Good luck!** *(THREE stands and takes FOUR's hand.)* **No matter how bad a first job is, at least it gives you experience and makes it easier to get a better job later.** *(FOUR smiles and faces audience.)*

THREE: *(Holds out hand to TWO)* **My cousin joined an exercise club, and he looks like a new person.** *(TWO takes THREE's hand and stands.)* **He says the people there keep him motivated, and he doesn't get bored like he used to when he tried to exercise at home.** *(THREE smiles and faces audience.)*

TWO: *(Holds out hand to ONE)* **I like your bake sale idea. I think we should do it.** *(ONE takes TWO's hand and stands.)* **If Ellen doesn't want to participate, that's OK. Let's plan it together.** *(TWO and ONE both smile and turn to face audience.)*

(Players at rear move forward, all still holding hands, so that all ten are lined up across the front of the stage.)

ONE and TWO: *(As they speak, they raise their clasped hands up high and keep them there. ONE also raises other hand.)* **Kind words bring joy.**

THREE and FOUR: *(As they speak, TWO, THREE and FOUR raise their clasped hands high and keep them there.)* **Kind words create happiness.**

FIVE and SIX: *(FOUR, FIVE and SIX raise clasped hands high and keep them there.)* **Kind words offer comfort.**

SEVEN and EIGHT: *(SIX, SEVEN and EIGHT raise clasped hands high and keep them there.)* **Kind words heal.**

NINE and TEN: *(EIGHT, NINE and TEN raise clasped hands high and keep them there. TEN also raises other hand.)* **Kind words lift sad hearts and, one by one, fill them with peace.**

ALL: **Be kind!** *(Together they lower hands and bow.)*

1 magazine cover. [illegible]

2 FOUR: [illegible] THREE [illegible] going to apply

3 for a job [illegible]

4 hand, [illegible]

5 [illegible] experience and [illegible] job later

6 [illegible]

7 THREE: [illegible] TWO [illegible]

8 [illegible] like a new person. [illegible]

9 [illegible] the people there keep him moti-

10 vated, and he doesn't [illegible] like he used to when he

11 [illegible]

12 TWO: (Holds out hand to ONE.) I like your bake sale idea. I think

13 [illegible] should [illegible]

14 doesn't want to participate, that's OK. [illegible]

15 [illegible] TWO and ONE [illegible]

16 [illegible]

17 [illegible]

18 ONE and TWO: [illegible]

19 high and keep them there. ONE [illegible] Kind

20 words bring joy.

21 THREE and FOUR: [illegible]

22 [illegible] Kind words

23 [illegible] happiness [illegible]

24 FIVE and SIX: (FOUR, FIVE and SIX [illegible]

25 [illegible] Kind words [illegible]

26 SEVEN and EIGHT [illegible]

27 [illegible] and keep them [illegible] Kind words heal.

28 NINE and TEN: [illegible]

29 [illegible] high and keep them there. [illegible]

30 [illegible] words [illegible] heard [illegible] with peace.

31 [illegible]

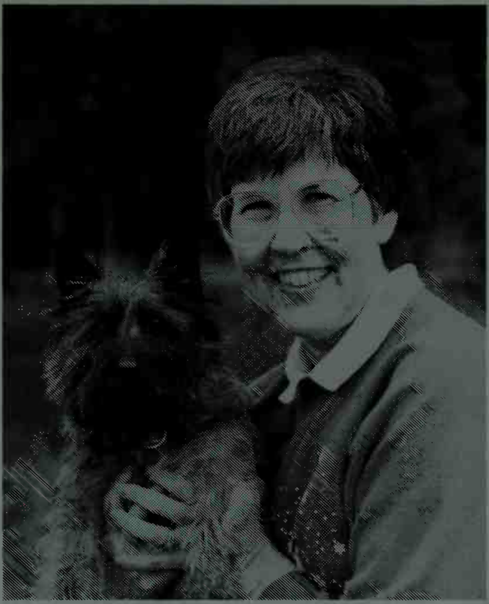
32 [illegible]

33 FIVE: [illegible] to FOUR: Your new [illegible]

34 [illegible] FIVE's hand [illegible] You should

35 [illegible] it that way. You look like [illegible] in

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Peg Kehret enjoys a dual profession: playwright and novelist. Her funny, heart-warming plays have been produced in all 50 states and Canada, while her books for young people have earned a wide readership and critical acclaim.

Early in her career, Peg wrote radio commercials. Later, she published magazine fiction, articles, light verse, educational scripts and adult nonfiction books.

Among her many honors are the Forest Roberts Playwriting Award, a Children's Choice Award, and selection by the American Library Association for its Recommended Books for Reluctant Readers. Her books are frequently on Young Reader's Choice lists for various states and her work has been published in Denmark, Australia, Norway, Portugal, Canada, and Scotland.

Peg and her husband, Carl, live in Washington State. They have two grown children and two grandchildren.

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